

## **Wayne Roberts Interviews with Ross Dowson, Toronto c.1988**

*Transcribed with permission from W. Roberts, from 14 sessions, into 11 parts and 84-plus subheads re-assembled chronologically and by subject for publication, with annotations and notes by John Darling and Cliff Orchard in 2017 from a National Archives MP3 disc in the Wayne Roberts Fonds (copy of original soundtrack transcriptions on this archive file.) (J.D. and C.O. became members of the SEL in 1958 and 1957 respectively.)*

*(All sub-heads and Notes by the Web Ed.)*

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## Wayne Roberts interview of Ross Dowson (Toronto c.1988-89)

### Part 1 Growing up in Toronto

*WR: Can you tell us a bit about the area you grew up in – you were born in Toronto?*

Yes, I was born in Toronto and I've lived all my life in Toronto practically – except for periods when I lived over in Europe at the behest of comrades in the movement.

*WR: And your father was a printer I believe?*

Yes, my mother and father were both born in Toronto. As a matter of fact I was up here at the hospital – the Wellesley Street Hospital (*since demolished –Ed.*) and I booked in for a little medical help and I got talking to one of the fellows who was registering all about you. This fellow turned to me and said “You know Mr. Dowson, you are the first person I've ever met in Toronto in all of 15 years I've worked in Wellesley Hospital, who was born in Toronto” – hah! – so I was an eminent person – born in Toronto.

*WR: can you tell me a bit about the neighbourhood you grew up in – the kind of people who lived there, and your own parents?*

Well, it was a really petit-bourgeois area, it was the High Park area. It so happened my mother's father was a school principal, and he speculated with property like most persons of a petit-bourgeois background. So my Mother had a modest estate that she inherited, and it became the property of her family, her children. So I lived in a rather good home in the centre of the High Park area. I had the privilege of High Park and persons who were neighbours were persons of means, with children who were well brought-up, etc., well-schooled, etc.

*WR: Was there anything in your upbringing that influenced you to become a radical in terms of the early kind of values that your parents would have taught you?*

Well, my father was of course a radical, a rebel – he was a philosophical anarchist. He was by trade a printer, and of course printers were the more sophisticated workers – he was self-taught. He had no formal education of any substance; but he was a self-taught man, he read a lot, his trade required him to, but he was also a unionist – Toronto was a centre of the printing trade, and while he was not an active unionist, he was a unionist. He was a skilled worker, a foreman at several big shops like Hunter-Rose, which was the biggest shop at one time, and at Eaton catalogue – he worked on that – but he was an anarchist – he opened the doors of radical thought to our whole family, and he was an atheist. This was a thing that he took a stand on among friends and associates who came to visit the family – people knew he was an atheist – this fascinated me, that he cut across this all this background that I grew up in, and opened a door to critical thought. I became sort of –

*WR: When were you born, Ross?*

In 1917

*WR: Was that a big thing in the late 1910s and 20s to be an atheist?*

Oh yes, as a matter of fact there was a fellow by the name of Bert Levins, who subsequently became CCF-MLA – he and a fellow named Stiles, conducted street-corner meetings downtown, on the corner

of the Massey Hall street – Mutual Street – they held meetings there, and they were driven off the corners by the police periodically – some good citizen would express indignation, you know, Toronto is a religious community – they defied it and they went to jail – as a matter of fact I think they were banned from the streets ultimately. But Stiles was more than an atheist – he was also I would say, basically, a communist, although not a member of the Communist Party to my knowledge, and (Bert) Levins was a left-CCFer.

*WR: Was atheism attacked as a radical left-wing ideology?*

Yes, because they were up-front, they carried on a consistent campaign. I went to some of the street-corner meetings and listened to them sometimes but I didn't think it had any depth or understanding of the social conditions in this country – it was sort of an academic question – is there a God or isn't there a God – interesting, but it doesn't go anywhere you know. But, there was this milieu, and my father always let it be known that he didn't believe in orthodox church views, so I was open to this critical thought.

My brother – Murray – was years older than I and more sophisticated – so we talked in the family – my family was quite opinionated people – all of them were – and our dinner table was quite an exhilarating centre where everyone would say what they had to say. My mother was quite a modest person, but an honest person who didn't come from a working-class family, but who became sensitive to working-class issues – as a young girl with both her parents dead, she was a determined person, to help herself and her sister, and she took up stenography, which of course then was an unusual thing, a young woman who became a stenographer – both of them became stenographers and they moved out.

My mother raised a family of seven children, so that became a full occupation for her, but she was stimulated by her experiences – she continued to grow – as we children became radicals she became radical – she joined the CCF, she became an activist in the CCF. But she opposed *our* involvement in it, the involvement of her children, as it was taking place, because she was under pressure of people in her street, the people who lived in her community, who were quite petit-bourgeois. She became a radical herself, and towards the end, she identified herself completely with her children's radical views and radical involvement. (*speech emphasis*)

But my father – they broke up, after a period – was not a serious radical in the sense of involvement in any political movement, but he was open to eccentric views you might say, what you would call eccentric rebel-thought; that was what I grew up with; and later on when we moved up to York Township, that was the biggest impact on me.

*WR: York Town is where?? When did you move there?*

This was Mount Dennis, before you get to Weston Road – this was a very working class area – English – as a matter of fact, it was right after the stock-market crash (1929-Ed.) (*It was said that*) people associated with our movement on the basis of some kind of financial difficulty. It's not true. My father never played the stocks, but when we moved up there – My mother moved up there to consolidate some of the properties that she had inherited – she had become drained by the taxes – we were property-poor, but that property was held, and of course with seven children one has to have a stable house – so we moved up there. That had a big impact on me, because that was a solidly working-class area with a very high unemployment rate – (*I attended*) the York Memorial high school there.

The teachers were radicals. The secretary of the League for Social Reconstruction was Isobel Thomas – she was a teacher there, a literature teacher, at York Memorial – she was a radical – though I never knew that she was the Secretary of the League for Social Reconstruction, but I must have somehow felt

this, you know – it was a fact anyway, that's what she was – and here I was a young kid going through high school – I was susceptible to radical views, and there were many radicals – my fellow students were sons and daughters of workers, and many of them were radicals. The unemployed movement was a mass movement in York Township, and there was one out of five families on relief, so there was no snobbery about the problems of life, you know – this was a hard-hit community – people lost their homes, their children couldn't get jobs – until the war came. That solved the problem.

### **As a high school activist in the unemployed movement**

*WR: How did you see unemployment as a high school student?*

I was anti-capitalist – I identified with the strike as the unemployment worker's movement mobilized itself, as they carried on strikes to raise the welfare rates. They occupied the Township offices – took it over – held the Reeve incommunicado for a day or so I think – I don't have this at my fingertips.

*WR: You were about 15 at the time*

Roughly

*WR: And you were affected by the strikes of the unemployed?*

Yes, because I saw it all – I'd go to school; there would be the strike; they were making workers work for their relief, so they went on strike – so I saw those things – I knew these people. I knew the fathers through their sons and daughters you know – and it was quite dramatic – they were important strikes – so I became acquainted with that, and of course I identified with it.

*WR: What was the impact and the effect on the high school students?*

Well, there was a radicalization in the high school. There were socialist clubs – some of the teachers were open to radical views and they made classrooms available for extra-curricular class clubs, and I attended some of them – they talked openly about socialism, communism, fascism –

*WR: (This was going on) in high schools at that time?*

Oh yes, but this was a new high school, a whole new category of teachers were there – they were affected by this too, you know – coming into radical times – and the CCF was moving in those days, you know – I knew nothing about the CCF in the early days, but as I told you some of the teachers were active in the League for Social Reconstruction – well, this was quite a radical circle. They wrote that very fine book on the reconstruction of Canada – Social Planning for Canada – I don't think I was aware at the time, but it must have become known to me, you know. When you are 14 or 15 you know you don't have much consciousness and I didn't have too much, but there was a radical milieu, and you had to take stands in the student milieu, you know – you had to take stands on questions – young people were challenging, challenging one another, and challenging society.

Like, I went to a class which was held by the Spartacist Youth League which was the youth league of the Workers Party of Canada – which was the Canadian Trotskyist movement – and that class was on Gustave Myers' *History of Canadian Wealth* which opened a whole door to me because Myers who wrote this book gave the first analysis of the nature of Canadian capitalism society – quite a revealing book – it came out during the next wave of radicalism – a new edition of it came out – this book never was finished by Myers – the first volume came out – I read that several times – I went to a class on it, and we discussed that book – but that was reproduced. I think it was Norman Penner wrote an introduction to a new edition for Lorimers in the next wave –

*WR: No, Penner wrote on the Winnipeg General Strike*

Ryerson wrote it.

## The Spartacist Youth

*WR: Was this the Spartacist Youth?*

Yes, this was the youth group of the Canadian Trotskyist movement which was led by Maurice Spector and Jack MacDonald, who had been founders of the Communist Party and the theoretical leaders. MacDonald was a mass leader, a trade unionist, the most eminent leader of the Communist movement, and Spector was the theoretician of the CP. He was a delegate to the Executive Committee of the Communist International\* – a very able person. But I never met them until a later stage – but the Spartacist Youth League was under their influence. I heard about them you know, but I didn't know them. My brother Murray was much more sophisticated than I was, and he joined them, and I started to move around this circle. This was my introduction to radical revolutionary politics. (*\*the C.I. was the body uniting the world-wide CPs under Russia's leadership – see Trotsky: The First Five Years of the C.I. Vols.1 & 2: Pioneer Publishers 1945 & 1953 & Pathfinder Press, New York -Ed.*)

*WR: Did they move right into classes?*

Oh yes, the connections The (person) who held and administered the class on Gustave Myers' book was Les Hood – he was a leader in the postal workers union – I didn't know him at the time until I was introduced to him, but he became subsequently a very well known unionist in the Toronto area. So the early Trotskyist movement had not large connections with trade unionists, but it had important ones, and Les Hood was one of them.

*WR: Do you have anything more about Les Hood?*

Les Hood – well he was a close friend of MacDonald's – he and his wife shared the MacDonald house on – I forget the name of the street, at any rate I didn't know him too well because I wasn't interested in unions – I was interested in socialist history and the history of the class struggles and what was happening in Russia at the time, (on) the Left Opposition (*established in opposition to Stalin's usurping power over the Revolution in the late 1920s –Ed.*) (When) I came in – the first meeting I remember of public significance was a mass meeting held in the Labor Temple on Church Street at that time – it was centre of the labor movement – aside from the Labor Lyceum over on Spadina – but the Labor Temple was the main one. And Maurice Spector, who had been in the United States working with the American Trotskyists as the editor of their theoretical journal – he came up and gave a speech on the Moscow Trials. At that time the world Trotskyist movement was trying to educate people on the significance of the Moscow Trials, which were a horrifying experience.

*WR: What period was this?*

Around 1937-1938 – that period (*and in the earlier 30s as Ross and Murray became active – Ed.*)

*WR: When you were first starting to become publicly associated with the radical movement?*

Yes, I went to that mass meeting – Spector was a tremendous orator – a brilliant orator – a man of intelligence and sophistication.

*WR: How did he impress you?*

There's a famous picture of Eugene V. Debs, which shows Debs in a dramatic posture which is so excessive (...) Lenin talked about if you saw someone sharpening a pair of scissors and you didn't know what they were doing, it would look like something ridiculous – irrational – well this gesture was something Spector developed – which is one of Deb's gestures – he was a mass orator, dramatic and powerful and he carried himself in a way a good speaker does – and this impressed me very much as a

person who is sophisticated, able, class-conscious and an effective leader – that was the only time I ever saw Spector – he was an international figure at that time – he was as I said a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International and founder of the Communist Party of Canada, who was expelled for Trotskyism (*in 1928 – see Trotsky: The Revolution Betrayed, Pathfinder Press, 1970 --Ed.*)

He and James P. Cannon of the American party brought back from the (6<sup>th</sup> –Ed.) Congress of the C.I. the famous document of Trotsky's which was a criticism of the Bukharin and Stalin (*faction*), in which he condemned the theory of “socialism in one country” which he considered was the theoretical expression of the interests of the bureaucratic clique which was growing in the Soviet Union – this was the first important document that I ever read of a political and analytical character – on the basis of Bukharin's presentation on behalf of Stalin on the theory of “socialism in one country” to which Trotsky replied in his famous document “The Third International After Lenin” in “A criticism of the draft program of the Communist International” where Trotsky demolished as a violation of Leninism this theory of “socialism in one country,” which Trotsky said is the inevitable expression of a bureaucratic conservative clique.

### **Leadership and activities in the movement of the 1930s**

*WR: Can you tell us about some of the leaders when you were about 13 to 15-- (RD: In this period, yes) – can you tell us about some of the activities of the organization?*

Well the main area of activity was the unemployed movement. I was a student youth and I couldn't move into the unemployed movement too effectively, except (when) the unemployed youth started to organize, so I moved among them, and the big issue among them, was aside from identifying with their struggle was this struggle of their fathers, their mothers, their parents – the big struggle was Spain. So I remember going to a meeting on Caledonia (*Street, NW Toronto –Ed.*), where the unemployed met, and I met some working-class youth who were really concerned about Spain – some of whom eventually went over to Spain. I remember I met a fellow by the name of Beckett, who I subsequently learned got killed in Spain – I met him just before he was going over to Spain – and I tried to convince him that the Spanish Revolution was already in gravest jeopardy because the Communist Party had manipulated its position, (within) the Spanish working class movement, to isolate, and eventually, decapitate, the party of peasants' and workers' unity, the POUM (“*Workers Party of Marxist Reunification*”), and the CNT5, the Anarchists.

The mass labor movement of Spain was not the Communist Party, but the Anarchist movement, the CNT5, a quite large and broad centrist movement, the leaders of which were close to, had fraternal relations with Trotskyism. The Stalinists manipulated their influence through being able to supply arms, to counteract Mussolini's army of fascists – they used their influence to develop their prestige in the Spanish Civil War, and they used it in a sectarian and vicious factional way, and they were instrumental in murdering the leading revolutionaries.

There was an interesting writer in Toronto – his name was Hugh Garner – one of the first popular writers, and he went to Spain, and a fellow who I subsequently got to know, a fellow by the name of Henry Beatty, who was a young person who came back under the tutelage of the Communist Party to raise funds for the International Brigade. But he came back and started to talk about his experiences in Spain. He came in contact with the POUM and the CTN and the 5, and he was there when the Stalinists attempted to decapitate the working class leadership in Catalonia.



I don't know if you've read *Homage to Catalonia* – which is one of the most poignant and powerful books on Spain – but Orwell wrote on the basis on his experience of going to Spain, and the exhilaration and the idealism and the hopes that everybody had, of the revolutionary currents, to carry out the revolution in Spain, which had become a pole for the refurbishing of the revolutionary forces.

*WR: You mentioned the fellow Beattie you met in Toronto*

Yes, I didn't really know him in any real respect, because he was downtown, and was in contact with the downtown comrades. I lived in the Township, which was really quite separate – I used to come down to common meetings, but in precisely the downtown area especially among the needle trades (*garment trades workers –Ed.*) there were sophisticated circles of radicals in Canada – the Jewish working class.

So I met Beatty when he came over to Canada following the tour he made in the United States on behalf of the American Trotskyists. Beatty had made contact when he came back with the Trotskyist movement because he was challenged with being a “Trotskyist.” He (had gone) over to Spain as a member of the Communist Party and he became one of their proteges. He came back to Canada in advance of the demobilization of the Spanish battalions, as a recruiter, as a person to raise funds and garner support – basically a person of some talent, an articulate person – he was honoured – he became an honorary organizer in the Toronto area, if I'm not mistaken – I'd like to check that out – but, I wrote a pamphlet which can be obtained (see “*A suppressed page in Canadian history: Canada & the Civil War in Spain; In tribute to Henry Scott Beattie, veteran of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*” – also available with photos at W12, Labor Challenge, 1972-Jun.5abcd – Ed.)

I remembered at one time when I was interested in Spain, that Trotsky was appealing to world public opinion to denounce Stalin's frameup of the Lenin cadre (*the Bolshevik Party cadre, leaders of the Russian Revolution – Ed.*) It's generally known now, on the basis of (*Russian Soviet premier*) Gorbachov's “glasnost” (*literally “thaw” in the Stalinist deep-freeze regime which reinstated many of Stalin's victims in 1956 – Ed.*) that Stalin manipulated the world Communist movement and of course he manipulated the communist movement in Spain. And Trotsky appealed to world public opinion to denounce Stalin and to save the Lenin cadre against the Moscow frame-ups. So he appealed to Malraux at the time – André Malraux had written a book called *Man's Fate* which was one of the great novels of the 1930s – it's called a “Trotskyist” novel – at any rate, in this novel Malraux developed a great credibility among radicals because its a very fine novel, about the destruction of the Shanghai Commune, at Stalin's behest.

So Trotsky appealed to world public opinion. I remember reading a reply by Malraux to Trotsky when he said he wouldn't support the investigations of the Moscow Trials – that Spain was the issue, not the Moscow Trials. I remember a reply by Trotsky (to Malraux) where Trotsky said “the fate of Spain is being decided in the Moscow Trials,” because Stalin framed the revolutionaries and made out that they were the “fifth column” – made out that they were agents of Franco – this was the nature of the Moscow Trials, (which) were used to destroy the Lenin cadre, to frame them as agents conscious or unconscious of Franco, of Japan, of fascism – so I thought Trotsky's rejoinder which was very powerful – that “the fate of Spain is being decided at the Moscow Trials,” because the Trials were the overriding issue – that's when I came into the movement, and it was a big experience for me to understand the relationship of the Moscow Trials to the development of the Communist movement – the Stalinization of the world Communist movement.

## Unionism in the 1930s

WR: *What was the reaction to unionism in the 1930s?*

Well they had no jobs, and they weren't in shops – so it was very difficult for them –

WR: *What about the packinghouse workers?...*

Well, it so happened I was in jobs that were marginal shops from the point of view of the ordinary working class – I worked at Canada Packers and I worked on night shift – and job conditions were terrible – but I was an Anglo worker – an English-speaking worker – the bulk of the workers in the shops were Italians and Ukrainians etc. I was never able to organize that place – I tried to organized it, but this was a big matter against me – I was an English-speaking, student, youth who was a radical and couldn't establish a real relationship with these workers – they weren't organized until well on into the War.

As a matter of fact it was always my opinion that there was an illusory picture given of the '30s given by radicals in their reminiscences – in my opinion, the radicalization from the point of view of political sophistication and trade union militancy didn't unfold until the War – until the period when the King government, in order to pacify the working class of this country, *recognized* the unions. Up until then, the unions weren't going anywhere except in the needle trades, the most militant, the most radical unionists, were organized. But the broad layers were not organized, and the CIO didn't come with the Oshawa strike although the Oshawa strike started to open up the door. Certain cadre was developed, and when there were jobs, and when the bosses eased off in their harassment of workers, the unions started to jell (*emphases in voice of speaker*).

That shop that I had worked in – Canada Packers – was organized subsequently by Freddy Dowling and others – Dowling, I met him in the CCF youth movement. I met Emon Park and a whole group of people who came to the CCF through Charles Millard – and found a position in the union movement. They became the leaders of the union movement although they were not workers – they were students and promising young radicals and an entree was made for them by Millard and other unionists who had a background in the union movement through certain struggles. But these people became quite important during the development of the union movement in Canada. They came from the CCF youth (*... garbled recording*)

WR: *Can you tell me something about some of the people you knew in the Trotskyist movement – in let's say York Township?*

Well I came across Earl Birney, who subsequently became very well known as a radical poet. But he was a revolutionary – he was a leading activist in the Trotskyist movement. He had joined the Trotskyist movement in the United States through a fellow I subsequently came to know, Joe Hansen. Birney was a prof at Salt Lake University State, in Utah, I guess. And he came in touch with this fellow Joe Hansen. And he became a Trotskyist. He subsequently came back to Canada, and participated in the Canadian Trotskyist movement (*for a period until the outbreak of war in late 1938 -Ed.*) He was a very talented man, aside from being a poet of some skill. He was a sophisticated, and intelligent, critically-minded theoretically-oriented person, and he became a leading activist in the Trotskyist movement. I met him in York Township. But he was primarily in the downtown area.

There are others whom I knew – I told you about Les Hood who was a leader in the Postal Workers Union, subsequently. I met several needle-trade workers who were very able and very sophisticated persons, who played a considerable role in the needle-trade unions which was the centre of radical unionism and radical politics. The Jewish working class were the most advanced elements of the

working class at that time. It was a big life – I'd come down from the Township where the unemployment movement was the main thing; but when I came down to the centre, all the whole world political arena opened up.

The Jewish radicals were extremely sophisticated. They used to read the *New York Times* and discuss the latest developments in Spain – the nuances of the developments, the tasks of the revolution, the slogans of the revolutions – the French Popular Front – all these matters were discussed in great detail by young Trotskyist intellectuals who I got to know. But I was a never really part of them, because I lived in York Township – they worked on a different level than I – but I knew these comrades. I am trying to think of some other persons who subsequently became quite well known.

*WR: Joe Meslin, would he have been around at that time?*

Yes, Joe Meslin was an activist in the needle-trades. He was considered by most of the comrades as sort of a gad-fly, you might say, a person who moved around rather than who built and structured anything. He was an intelligent, sophisticated person who considered himself a Trotskyist, but who was a stimulator – that's what he was. He became an organizer for the Fur and Leather Workers Union, with Max Federman – he was a very close collaborator with Max Federman – who was a well-known unionist – but the unemployed movement remained a big factor. There was a person in Scarborough I got to know – his name was Jack Kane – he just recently died – he became a leader in the CAW, in the autoworkers union – I didn't know this – I'd lost contact with him. But many persons who were activists in various sectors of the working class movement came through the (*Workers'*) Party – or up through the Trotskyist movement and went on into other areas.

*WR: Can you tell me more about Jack Kane?*

Well, Jack Kane I met in the unemployed movement, when he was a Trotskyist leader in the Scarborough area where there was a mass unemployed movement, parallel to the York Township one. They were three, I think, if I recall correctly, three areas on the outer fringe of Toronto which were the centres of the unemployed movement. Most of these workers were immigrant workers – poor – some of them had built their own houses and they were having difficulty getting jobs of course – they had to take marginal jobs – they were in these three areas – Scarborough, where they elected a Reeve, the first CCFer, Reeve Williams I think his name was – I can't remember the name – but Jack Kane was a leading activist in the unemployment movement – and I noted the other day, but I'd lost contact with him – I noticed he died the other day and there was a sizeable memorial article on him in the *Globe & Mail* or the *Star* – and learned from that he'd played a key role in the autoworkers – in CAW (*see below—Ed.*) – which was logical – all these persons were leading activists; they may not have been public leaders in the Trotskyist movement but they were of the calibre of leaders – and Jack Kane was one of these persons. He was a leading unemployed worker in Scarborough.

There was another one who was a leader in the TTC – I've forgotten his name – they were cadre elements who helped build the union movement wherever they were, and subsequently, many of them became quite prominent. Again, Kane was rather interesting. I knew he was a leader – I met him as a leader in the unemployed movement – he was a leader in the Trotskyist movement – he subsequently became a leader in the Frigidaire workers if I am not mistaken and later, (was among those) who were in the UAW and who led part of the break to CAW.

## **The unemployed movement**

*WR: When we get to the Second World War, employment starts to go on the upswing again – can you give me a sense of what personal effect this had on you, and the radical movement?*

Well, the workers took some time to respond to the challenges that capitalism presented them during the economic debacle – the world-wide crisis of capitalism. Workers in Canada had no experience of this type – of joblessness, you know – generally the Canadian economy went through cyclical crises of capitalism, but they were short durations, and they were not deep – but then what was known as the Great Depression was at first, a catastrophic experience for the workers – they lost their homes, they lost everything – their families broke up. I remember I met some comrades who were in the process of radicalization during the Depression, and they broke up with their wives and their families – a real crisis. People didn't meet – I used to go over and visit comrades – one comrade had a home with 4 or 5 children, just near the unemployed worker's meeting hall, so I used to drop in on them there – and they didn't have food on the table – and this fellow was a hard worker, an innovative person, a guy with initiative – a lot of workers were just overwhelmed, and (they) just disintegrated during the Depression.

This generation doesn't know what it means to try to get a job when there are no jobs – I remember I was kicked out of the house by my mother – my mother drove me to get a job, because after a while you no longer had the initiative any longer – and I remember I picked one up just to prove to her there were jobs – she was convinced I had neglected looking for a job because I got a job – but a lot of workers, particularly older workers, or not very presentable, young, or old, or didn't have clothes – people didn't have clothes you know – I remember one worker made quite a sensation because some people got clothes from the shops that were set up by the Township to help unemployed workers – and, he got a tuxedo, and he made much of wearing it on his relief job – here was this guy sweeping the streets with a big heavy broom, in a tux – a lot of little anecdotes could be given of this type I suppose – but it was a catastrophe and it wrecked the lives of thousands and thousands of people – it led to malnutrition – there was even malnutrition in my family unknown to me – my younger brother got a chest deformation – he got “rickets” – and my mother worked hard to keep our family together, and keep it functional, and to feed us – a big fight to survive – but my young brother had rickets which was a disease of poverty, of lack of nutrition. If this hit our family, it must have hit millions of people – I'm sure it built up the army's rejects – the next generation suffered all this loss of unemployment income, and loss of nutrition.

*WR: Were there any meeting places for unemployed people, like restaurants or other kinds of hang-outs?*

I'm sure there were, but the restaurant owners didn't exactly welcome them because they took up seats – took up space – but I guess they were also a source of income, because a lot of those restaurants worked on a very marginal basis. They'd hang around on the street-corners – I don't have a feeling for this period because I was not unemployed, it so happened, but I know comrades who were – I'm sure they stayed at home, gave up the struggle for a job because it was useless, futile... I had that experience – while I was younger more job opportunities were available to me and I had a junior matriculation which was a high degree of education at that time – workers left the school system you see – some didn't go to school because they didn't have clothes – they didn't eat regularly – so they gave up the struggle for life in many ways.

## **The CCF Youth**

*WR: Can you tell me a bit more about the CCF youth?*

Oh yes, the radicalization in reality declined in Canada in the years before the War – it was in decline. And there was a problem of finding areas of work. The only movement which was viable, was the CCF, and this started to become a mass political formation under the leadership of J.S. Woodsworth, who was a man of considerable courage, and determination, ability, and who as I said who for a period wrote a column for *The Worker*, which was edited by Maurice Spector, who subsequently became a

known Trotskyist. So this movement started to become a mass movement; it started to attract workers. Basically the core of the CCF was religious, Christian socialist – it reflected Woodsworth in a very clear way – Coldwell, Tommy Douglas, all these people were Baptists, they were Christian socialists, persons who were shocked by the excessive cruelty of the capitalist system in the Depression. And they became an important factor in the radicalization – not the Winnipeg General Strike, though many of them played a role in that strike – this Winnipeg General Strike got lost from the point of view of workers in Ontario – it got lost in history – it was a Winnipeg experience, and the only persons who knew about it were the radicals. But the masses of the working class in the areas of Toronto, and Montreal, St. Catharines and the Niagara peninsula – the big issue became the union movement – following the rise of the CIO. The AFL proved to be incapable of meeting the challenges of the time. The idea of industrial unionism – one union where all the workers got together and where unskilled workers were organized – that was the big break-through – that was what started to restructure the radicalization in Canada – the rise of the CIO.

*WR: Did the CCF Youth play a major role –?*

Yes I was just going to come to that – The CCF Youth played a big role – they started to move into it, because of Millard, because of the credibility of Woodsworth, and various people like Jimmy Simpson who became mayor of Toronto – these people opened the doors to the new elements of the youth who wanted to identify and become part of the radicalization. So many of these young people became organizers – for instance, I started to become active in the CCF youth – the CCYM – I met Irene Tallman, I met Freddy Dowling, Emon Park – they were right-wing reformists, but they were **reformists** – they were activists, political, they were attached to the CCF. I came into this movement and identified with it but there were a lot of radical youth too, and – I remember they expelled me from the movement, from the CCF youth – but I made some substantial connections with them – I got to know Dowling. I remember when they expelled me, Dowling came over to me and he told me he hoped I wouldn't leave the radical movement because of what they did. I thought it was rather touching! *(laughs)* – You know – I subsequently met Dowling when he came around the Rosedale NDP *(after 1961—Ed.)* before he died and he made some very friendly gestures toward me in remembrance of those experiences – but they were to the right – they were not socialists – Christian socialists, humanists. They were not really class struggle socialists but they became heads of the union movement through the influence of Millard and others, the prestige of the Coldwell-Woodsworth leadership.

## **The Workmen's Circle**

*WR: I believe (that aside) from your work in the CCF youth, you also worked in the Workmen's Circle, where you met Emma Goldman – could you talk about that?*

Well, we were always trying to find avenues to put forward socialist views, you know, and I remember I was approached by Joe Meslin, for one, who you mentioned earlier, who became an organizer with Federman of the Fur Workers – he approached me about the Workmen's Circle, which had undergone a split in the period of ultra-leftism that Stalin promoted in the world Communist movement where he said the Social-Democrats are really the “Social-Fascists,” that they were opening the door to fascism – this disoriented many people, you know – the Communist Party split. It was in the Workmen's Circle – it carried the split everywhere, the “theory of social-fascism” and that's where UJPO, the United Jewish People's Order, comes from – a split-off from the Workmen's Circle – they thought, according to Stalin, the main enemy were the social-democrats – the reformists – he called them “social fascists,” so there was an international schism that took place, and in Canada the Workmen's Circle was broken up, was split, by the Communist Party, and out of it came the UJPO.

But I went into the Workmen's Circle upon the request of some leading socialist activists in the Circle –

they were concerned about preserving the Workmen's Circle, and they didn't know how to fight the Communist Party on a principled basis. They attempted to, but they didn't have many young people; many of them were foreign workers – the Jewish workers were the basis of the Circle – many of them were anarchists – and they invited me, and others, to come in and participate in the Workmen's Circle so I joined it, and I met a considerable number of persons who played a prominent role in the Canadian Left, through that experience. I'm trying to think who...

I went out with a young woman who was in the Workmen's Circle, she was in the Medim Club – I'm not sure of the name – they were all named in honour of prominent figures in the Jewish and international labor movement. I belonged to the John Reed Club, in honor of one of the founders of the (US) CP, and whose book *Ten Days Which Shook The World* became the theme of Beatty's film "Reds" – I was articulate at that time, and I wrote a bit – I helped publish a small paper – it was an active life in the Workmen's Circle – I was in the English section – most of people were in the predominant Yiddish language section of the Circles – but they were trying to revive their movement because of the generational gap which had developed. The Jewish workers had a substantial milieu in Jewish life in the centre of Toronto, but their children were anglophones; so I met many of them. I was going out with this girl – her parents were anarchists and fairly well-to-do.

They had opened their doors to Emma Goldman, who came up to Toronto in the early period of the War. I didn't meet Emma Goldman – I knew she was living at the home of this family and I got in touch with Emma Goldman by phone and suggested to her – because the War was such a critical matter – that she as an imminent anarchist and an opponent to war and a partisan of the class struggle, could make a valuable contribution to mobilizing opposition to World War Two. So I spoke to Emma Goldman about articulating some of her views which we would publicize and make known to workers and it would fructify the processes which were beginning to take root in the Canadian working class – as an anti-war sentiment. But she said No – she was old and she was ill – she subsequently died very shortly after – I'm not sure when, but she died in Toronto, not far after the time I appealed to her to make a statement in opposition to war. There were other persons in the Workmen's Circle, but they were known in the Jewish milieu, they were not known in the broad milieu. I don't recall their names.

*WR: this milieu was quite distinct from the rest of the population?*

It was qualitatively different – it was politically on a high political plane, the issues of concern to the Jewish radical movement were the world-wide revolutionary problems – the Canadian workers were primitive compared to them – they had to have some of the experiences (*that the Jewish workers had*).

*WR: What caused the differences in the radicalization of the Jewish workers from the rest of the population?*

Well, the Jewish people came from Poland – they came from these areas, where there was a long history of struggle, where the BUND and the working-class movements were mass movements, where the Communist and Socialist movements were mass movements – like I remember at the time of the Moscow Trials something else suddenly came up which I was unaware of, aside from the murder of Lenin's co-workers – Stalin murdered the Polish working-class movement leadership – the leaders Erlich and Alter. And when I was in the Workmen's Circle I became acquainted with them, and we tried to launch a defence for Erlich and Alter, who were framed and murdered by Stalin's henchmen in Poland.

So, I was up at the Workmen's Circle recently, and I met some people up there – I'd gone to a wedding reception – and there was a picture of Erlich and Alter – and I approached some of the persons there that they should hold a memorial meeting for Erlich and Alter, because (*Soviet Premier*) Brezhnev was

opening up the (*Russian Soviet*) archives and was in the process of apparently rehabilitating Bukharin and Radek who were also framed by Stalin – but I never heard if they held a meeting or not. But Erlich and Alter were big issues of big concern among the Jewish working class then because they were respected leaders of the Polish working class – and the main core of the immigrant Jews were Polish Jews – and they were very sophisticated politically active people. The Workmen's Circle supported the CCF from the word Go – and subsequently the New Democratic Party. I could think of their names but I don't think they are worth publicizing at this time (*circa 1988-89*).

## **Our early relationship with the American movement**

*WR: How was the Trotskyist movement organized in the early days – how did it work?*

Well in the early days it was part of the American section, which I wasn't really aware of until some dissident Trotskyists told me – they were carrying their line and they told me – there was no Canadian section in a certain period, even though we had some top leaders – it so happened that Spector had been a member, and he went down to the States and he became a member of the American party – he became editor of *The New International* (*the SWP monthly magazine – a few volumes in this archive –Ed.*) I'm trying to think of who else did – at any rate we were a very small group in the Canadian section. In the earliest periods the comrades circulated the American (weekly) paper, *The Militant* – it became the paper of choice for us, but I don't think anyone considered it had a (*Canadian –Ed.*) perspective – always in the minds of the key core of the Canadian comrades they had the concept of a Canadian section – I did, I joined the Canadian section, I never had the concept of being a member of the American section, except in a fraternal sense, as a disciple of Trotskyism. I was a member of the Canadian section – I would have been startled if someone told me there is no Canadian section – I never thought in those terms – I never thought at all what is this section, we were so oriented to building a Canadian section that I didn't know we didn't have one. (Chuckles) At any rate...

*WR: (inaudible question about when Ross became active in the Canadian movement)*

I don't know. I just moved in. I mean, I came into the movement and we established ourselves. We were known. We were not novices, we weren't people who suddenly came on the scene. I just became more committed to the movement and I became more active and involved, and was recognized, aside from the Canadian comrades recognizing me and electing me at a convention, I was recognized vis-a-vis the American comrades as the leader of the Canadian section. There was no formal character to it, you know. I never went down and represented the Canadian section formally; I was never introduced. To my knowledge, I wasn't seated, as a delegate from the Canadian section – it was just automatic – oh, they're Canadian comrades – we were ipso facto recognized and willingly, satisfactorily integrated into the leadership, by a sort of osmotic process. I don't know that we could find any papers or any letters that said “We recognize you as the Canadian section.”

(Maurice) Spector was an international leader of the highest order – I don't know whether you know, but Spector was the first Canadian ever on the Communist International – not Buck, not any of these people, not Sam Carr – they were later, they came with the Stalin period. Spector established that relationship in the International on the basis of the authority of the Soviet leadership and the leaders of the Communist International – they recognized the stature of Spector, who was a leading theoretician in his own right.

And Macdonald – I don't know if he ever went to a World Congress – I'm not sure – in the latter years he was not well, you know, so I'm not sure if he ever did – and of course there were problems with establishing international conferences – there was always a monetary question you know – it's a big task to finance a world conference, and how vital is the Canadian section? I'm not for denigrating it, but

you know, with the money for bringing a comrade from India, and comrades from America were going, and there if there was a question of choice, there would be no question in my mind that we would sacrifice representation from Canada to the Indian comrades and give them the funds to make sure that they had some people to go to the world conference from there.

So, it was no issue – I was only told that the Canadian section was part of the American section, and that was a matter of convenience, not a matter of principle – as a matter of fact, it violated the norms you know, but I suppose in a sense we capitulated to the Canadian bourgeoisie's attitude of themselves and their whole country, maybe (*chuckles*) – I'm not laying any charges. But the International, as the challenges confronted it, recognized the Canadian section; for instance, when the American Party was organized as the Socialist Workers Party at a conference in Chicago after they came out of the Socialist Party of the United States, I went down there, and I went down with a couple of other comrades, and I was in the minority – I opposed the entry into the CCF. Before Macdonald died, the issue of the CCF came up to the fore, and there was a big debate in the movement – a big debate in a small pond, you know, with big frogs – and I opposed the entry. Macdonald carried out a 'French Turn' – applied the French Turn to the Canadian section, and so the Canadian section went into the CCF.

But I opposed it because I considered the CCF had just lost the elements who were the most attractive, the most possible to be won, to our ideology. Interestingly, I opposed it. I had come into the movement via the CCF Youth and I think the leading comrades – not very mature then, certainly, unchallengedly so – I think that the adult comrades in the Workers Party of Canada – which was the name of the movement – I think they thought that my work in the CCF youth and that of a couple of other comrades, was a very important experiment from the point of view of determining whether we could carry out an entry into the CCF – whether it was worthwhile – whether there was a milieu (that) we could favorably contribute to in the radicalization in the CCF. And I concluded on the basis of my experience in the CCF Youth (*along with*) a core of leading comrades in the adult group, agreed that they were opposed to Macdonald's orientation to the CCF. So I voted against the entry into the CCF, but it became a non-issue because the movement was deteriorating when this came to be voted on.

### **Our orientation to the early CCF in the mid-1930s**

The only places we had working branches was in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, but in other places we had contacts – in Saskatoon, in Hamilton, in Niagara Falls, we had contacts – a scattering of them, but those were the areas where we had a working team – modest, but a working team – and of course they had a future because they happened to be the main centres in Canada – so they had the future in their hands.

*WR: --You mentioned about the disagreements over the deep entry into the CCF – the Trotskyist 'French Turn' – was it a very demoralizing (experience)? Because, the CCF had just a large number of people outside?*

Well, let me try to recall it – you see, generally speaking, entry was carried out in say, in the French section – known as the 'French Turn' – in the (French) socialist democracy, because there was a developing left wing in the social-democratic party. In my opinion, there was no viable developing left wing in the CCF, and therefore I was opposed to the entry – we didn't have a policy of liquidation, weren't seeking a safe home retirement with retirement benefits or anything like that – we wanted to work for revolutionary socialism, for Marxism, in the mass movement – and in France the 'Turn,' (was) carried out in collaboration with persons who were moving in our direction. In the States it was carried out with a big success, with fusion with elements who were in the Socialist Party including Norman Thomas, for a period. That's well-documented and you can check that out in the American party – but



they carried out very successful entry – in other areas – the entry tactic is a very complicated tactic you know – when you move into a social-democratic or reformist movement, it's very difficult unless (there is) a radicalization process to integrate yourself (enabling) you to play a useful role. In my opinion that situation wasn't favorable in Canada – and that's why I opposed it – I have no reason to re-evaluate that, since then –

*WR: Why do you think (the left failed)?*

I think it had been booted out – I don't have the historical data at my fingertips – but, you know, Woodsworth imposed a trusteeship, expelled the entire Ontario section if I'm not mistaken, and (...) there were developing left-wing developments – they didn't know how to cope with it – and they tried to block it – and, I think the entire Ontario section if I'm not mistaken, had its membership lifted and (*the leadership enlisting*) a safe party (*membership*) was formed – so that's how that happened. Now, in BC that never did happen. The movement developed not homogenously – it wasn't a level playing-field, as they'd say – the BC working-class movement was more radical, and things couldn't be done that the right-wing would want to do, in BC, what they might want to do and were able to do, in Ontario. So...

*WR: Question (almost inaudible, about whereas in the American Socialist Party there was what was called the militant faction), in Canada I guess it was far enough left already in the CCF – would that have been the left wing in the CCF?*

Hmm – I think that the dynamics of the CCF had been (*slowed*) – I think at certain times, there were left elements in it, but as I say, the Ontario section was put into trusteeship, and (as) I understand – I don't have it at my fingertips – I understand old man Woodsworth was instrumental in disciplining the Ontario section. For instance, the formation of the Canadian Labour Party was of importance – the leadership of the Communist Party in the early days built, built the Canadian Labour Party – you perhaps will recall (*from your studies*) this better than I – but I remember the Canadian Labour Party was struck off – set up – by the Trades and Labour Congress, shortly after World War One, in the heyday of radicalization – they struck off the Canadian Labour Party – and Spector and Macdonald were leading officers, were instrumental, along with Jimmy Simpson, who was a right-winger, you know, reformist – so, in those early days the Canadian Communist Party was clued in to the value of participating in a movement which had a possibility of being broader, with good roots and connections in the union movement.

But that terminated – I'm not prepared to make a statement on that – I would have to think about it carefully – its an important experience, and its a matter of debate among circles of historians – elements in the Communist Party thought it was phoney, the Canadian Labour Party was a phoney situation – I'm sure Malcolm Bruce thought it was, but I don't think Macdonald did.

But that was terminated. I think that the cadre that went to the Lenin school – this is Stewart Smith, Sam Carr, and another well-known CPer – these elements thought that this was a diversion and a trap, and opposed this whole experience. This was in the period of the so-called “Leninization” of the Canadian party, which was really its Stalinization. By about 1927-28 the pioneer leaders of the Communist Party of Canada who were genuine working-class leaders in this country, they had all left the CP – had been expelled – (*Norman*) Penner makes a comment about this in his new book *Stalin and the Canadian Communist Party* – he has a section where he talks about the entire cadre – the founders of the CP of Canada – had all left the party by about 1928, and he is not referring just to the expulsion of Spector, but he is talking about Macdonald, and many others – they (*the Buck group* –*Ed.*) constituted a new leadership from the “Lenin school” – it was the Stalin school in reality, that's what it was – a new leadership was formed.

## Side comment on the politicization of the early unions

So the union movement started to become politicized through these experiences. I'm talking about these people because this general experience finds expression in human beings – but they were only the expression of it – the union movement started to become political very early – and to a large extent, of course, it was (*due*) to the influence of the British working-class movement – the international origins of the Canadian union movement. I think it would be a big error if we didn't take this into account – that the British working class came over here already class-conscious – the British workers were possibly the most class-conscious in the world, for a long period. And many of them came over to Canada and played a very important role in the Canadian labor movement – particularly in the union movement, with the CIO. They came ready-made for this.

(End of Part 1)

## PART 1 REFERENCES

1972 – Dowson, Ross: Talk #1, “The struggle to build a part of the class,” pp.1-27, in *The Labor Party and the Struggle for a Socialist Canada*, Forward Group, 2005 at W5-Labor Party Pt. 1 RTF & HTML

1988 – Mintz, Arnie: *A sketch of Ross Dowson*, Ch.1, 1934-36, Ch.2, 1936-39, Ch.3, 1939-45: text, photos and maps. SEE JPG files at W14-1988-10Oct12-1a-40 and RTF text file 10Oct27.rtf

## PHOTOS FROM W18

- c.1925 Pioneer Communists listen as Maurice Spector makes his point
- c.1930-1 "Moriarty funeral -- one of Mac" (*RD note*)  
Jack MacDonald [centre] at burial of Wm. Moriarty, founding member, Canadian CP--Toronto
- c.1930-4 Maurice Spector speaking full bore
- c.1932 "Anti-fascist parade July 11, 1932-33" "Free Tom Mooney & the Scottsboro Boys" ILO-International Left Opposition (Trotskyists expelled from but still loyal to Canadian CP -- to 1938)
- c.1933 Ross Dowson at 16 (*from Arnie Mintz: "A sketch of Ross Dowson" 1988*)
- 1934 *The Vanguard* (Workers' Party of Canada) "Unemployed organize!"
- 1935-1 Spartacus Youth League--Young workers "All out on May First!"
- 1935-2 "York Memorial Spartacus Club--York Memorial High School -- Ross top row, Lower left Murray Dowson, right side Sadie Jourard" (*Notes by RD's sister Lois Bédard*)  
"Spartacus corn roast, 1935--Sylvia is just behind Murray and to the left"(*notes Arnie Mintz*)
- 1937 Ross Dowson (20), a radical youth facing the challenge of coming world war and the renewal of the Canadian movement

## Part 2 The Moscow Trials

*WR: Did you read this literature about the time that Maurice Spector spoke on the Moscow Trials – did it play a role?*

*(They played)* A very big role – I remember very well how the Communist Party bookstore was full of Bukharin's verbatim (*record*) on the Moscow Trials – the world-wide effort of Stalin to reverse the direction of the Communist International (*the central federation of world CPs in Moscow – Ed.*) under his influence and against the traditions of Leninism – so I read this material.

*WR: Were the Moscow Trials the subject of a hot debate in the Left in Toronto at this time?*

I'm sure it must have been, but the Left of course was small – including the Communist Party. The mass labor movement had not come onto the arena. For instance, the drive for the CIO (for “industrial unionism” uniting all trades within plants in a single union) had yet to take place and have an impact in Canada, so you had a small left, in which the Woodsworth current of the CCF was a major one – a very major one, and (it) was broader than a parliamentary left, such as the NDP has to a large degree become. Woodsworth (*who later became a leading founder of the CCF in 1935*) was an effective mass leader, and worked with the early Communist movement. When Spector was editor of *The Worker*, Woodsworth carried a column, he wrote a column for *The Worker*. There was not a sectarian fear of it, and it was only later that (that) developed – (*after the rise of Stalinism – Ed.*) But where are we going?)

*WR: The time we're talking about now is when you were already involved as a Trotskyist, and you were becoming involved in the group when you were starting to see unemployment as a high school student in your decision to join the movement...*

Well there was a Trotskyist group in York Township – a very effective one – Spector had connections with persons who lived in York Township. If you read *Down the long table* by Birney – he has sections there which are based on the experience in York Township with the Trotskyist group that he was in contact with. Spector was a very aggressive and talented person, and he made himself available to other young intellectuals like Ken Johnstone – and he spoke at the groups and meetings that were held and organized by Ken Johnstone in York Township; so there was a Trotskyist nucleus among the unemployed and among the working class in York Township. I joined the York Township branch of the Workers Party of Canada – that was the name of the Trotskyist group at that time – along with the Spartacists, which was a youth group there; so I belonged to two groups, the adult and the youth group of the Canadian Trotskyist movement – and in those groups I met the leaders of those groups.

## Back to the Moscow Trials

*WR: Before we get onto that – and onto the radicalization that came out of the 1960s and 70s – what about the Moscow Trials, etc. (...) What was it about the character of radicals in the 1930s – was it impossible for you to get a hearing?*

Well, the movement was not a broad movement yet – it had yet to become a broad mass movement, and it had yet to transcend the level of unemployed strikes and welfare strikes and the fights for jobs. The World War (1939-1945) overwhelmed all this, you see – these issues disappeared with the war, because Canada moved in with lots of jobs, within a year or so – lots of jobs, and the unions became a big factor because the Canadian capitalist class didn't want to infringe on the profit-making they were about to accumulate, you know.

## The Moscow Trials and debates on the Left

WR: *I'm sorry, there are two more questions before we get to the war*  
OK I'm trying to push you, eh?

WR: *Can we go back a bit to the Moscow Trials and hear something about the debate in the public and the Left around the Trials?*

Well you know the Trotskyists had a terrible task before them – a **horrifying** responsibility, because Stalin was murdering the leadership of the world revolutionaries – across the world, in all countries, and Trotsky launched the struggle to defend the Leftist tradition of the Communist movement. The debates in the Canadian movement – I'm not acquainted with them – they no doubt took place, but they didn't take place openly – the Stalinists just overwhelmed everybody – they slandered, brought a new element (*of slander into*) the whole radicalization movement. I became known as an “RCMP agent.” (*voice emphasis in audio*).

This was what Stalin “proved to the world” through the Moscow Trials, presumably, about leading revolutionaries – that they were agents of the RCMP. As a matter of fact, it still holds – “glasnost” gives you a good idea (*why*) the Communist Party should re-evaluate its whole past – well, it hasn't done so, yet, because I remember just about a year ago, I was circulating some literature at an Allen Gardens mobilization in support of Nicaragua, and I was attacked by the Ontario leader of the Communist Party as an RCMP agent, which overwhelmed me! (*laughs*) Didn't overwhelm me to silence, but staggered me because I'd just more or less completed an 8-year struggle against the RCMP for its “dirty tricks” against the Trotskyist movement and against the entire Left. **So it's still with us, that crap** (*voice emphasis*).

WR: *Was that the character of this period in Toronto?*

That's why there wasn't a debate – because the Trial, the demands and challenges, were so gauche – Trotskyists were “agents of Hitler” or of Mussolini, (...) the barrage of propaganda by the Communist Party was so powerful – it had the resources of the Soviet state, and the illusions about Stalin – you know, the cult of Stalin was not just a cult that was carried by a few elements in the Communist Party, by Tim Buck and others, but it was broad. The illusions about Stalin was broadcast – the bourgeoisie played them. For instance the Moscow Trials were sustained by the ambassador to Russia, to Moscow – I think his name was Davis? He authenticated them. The bourgeoisie tried to authenticate the Moscow Trials, because they saw that Stalin was doing a good thing from their point of view – he was murdering the revolutionaries in the Moscow Trials.

WR: *Like in Toronto, were there prominent people who thought the Moscow Trials were legitimate?*

Generally, they weren't questioned – the Moscow Trials were not questioned – their authenticity – except by a few people who really understood what was going on. You know, we talk about the political movement – well, we (*find it difficult to understand*) that political movement in the '30s – it was nothing compared to the subsequent radicalization – the youth radicalization (*of the 1960s—Ed.*) and the broad radicalization taking place now. (*Then, in the 1930s*) most people were overwhelmed by the challenge of the depression, and with making a living – trying to organize the shops, trying to defend themselves.

WR: *They believed whatever – there wasn't an anti-authoritarian character like in the 1960s?*

Now, you know, *(there's)* skepticism, broad skepticism – the bourgeoisie don't have any real credibility in the minds of thinking people – but then, there was not much skepticism. The Communist Party was an active, interventionist force, it flooded that radicalization, with the frame-up evidence of Vishinski, who was a *(1917-1919)* White Guard who became Stalin's hack in the Moscow Trials and who framed the leaders of the October Revolution, Bukharin and Radek, in the three Trials. So the Trotskyists were being overwhelmed – the truth was being overwhelmed, by the Lie – and the Lie had power – it had the State machine, and an individual who was glorified by the *(British Anglican bishop)* Dean of Canterbury and others – I remember when the Dean of Canterbury came to Toronto – he carried with him pamphlets which showed Stalin as if he was Jesus Christ – the graphics on the propaganda presented Stalin with an aura, and a great liberator – and this was subsequently upheld by the Canadian bourgeoisie – when Stalin, and Russia became a key part of the Alliance. So they used the Communist Party, which supported the War effort of the Canadian bourgeoisie...

### **The effects of the Moscow Trials and the later 1956 Krushchev revelations on Stalin's crimes**

*WR: You mentioned the other day when talking about Jean-Marie Bédard – (...) did that continue in the 1940s and '50s in the sense – a lot of your ideas about the International and the American section (... inaudible)*

Well, we were in the process of gathering sufficient cadres that we could start to think about that. The Canadian question as such came to hit us (as) we were recruiting – our movement was growing and you would attract people who were not part of your earlier tradition – and there were new challenges before us, and we had to answer them. So we started to document our views on a whole series of questions, which had never happened before – you see, the Trotskyist cadre developed around Spector and Macdonald, who were real working-class leaders – brilliant intellectuals also, particularly Maurice Spector – but they were driven brutally from the radical movement – persons expelled and (isolated). For instance, you couldn't talk to Spector or Macdonald and remain a member of the CP – they were harassed (in an) unprecedented way.

Of course I came in at the time of the Moscow Trials – which are now being re-evaluated by Gorbachev you know – in the developments in the Soviet Union. But at that time, the Moscow Trials were a period of demoralization – (it was) the end, the death of the revolutionary cadre that had been built by Trotsky, but particularly by Lenin, in the Communist International – they were brutally murdered by Stalin – so the movement was in a period of defeat and disorientation – it was only rallied by the efforts of particularly Trotsky who launched a campaign in defence of the victims of the Moscow Trials – which was an astonishing action by Trotsky – (which) won a fair amount of response – we're now benefiting from that – the rehabilitation of Kamenev and Bukharin and Radek, and the revolutionary cadre of Lenin – but that period was a period of – you'd have to say – a defeat, on a terrible basis, where the traditions of the movement were being wiped out, you know.

And we were convicted by Stalin's cohorts as being agents of Japan or agents of Hitler, and of course we in Canada were all agents of the RCMP – (or) with whatever reactionary force could be identified publicly in the minds of the people, we were part of – the Trotskyists were – and it was commonplace. For instance I remember when Buck came back from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, we tried to make contact with workers who inevitably, we thought, would be influenced by Krushchev's revelations – well, I can remember, Buck was shaking in his boots at that time – we went up to the UJPO headquarters (where) Buck held a meeting after he came back from the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress – it was at Massey Hall – and he didn't say a thing about the Krushchev revelations – astonishing – people went down to hear what Buck would say, because the Krushchev revelations were published in the bourgeois press at that time – particularly the *New York Times* which published a big segment of the Krushchev speech, and ancillary

material.

So, we tried to make contact with CPers to bring them over to an understanding about what really was happening in the Soviet Union – but, we were baited viciously – I remember I had to flee, you might say, an ignominious experience – but we were trying to circulate Lenin's "Testament" – this was validated by the Krushchev revelations – he brought to the attention of the world there was such a thing as "Lenin's Testament," where he denounced Stalin, you see. This was denied for many, many years – it was first known by Max Eastman, 20 years before. When Krushchev reaffirmed it, we published parts of it, and we made a leaflet and circulated it to this big meeting which was held in the UJPO (*the radical United Jewish People's Organization*) headquarters off Christie Pits (*in West-end Toronto*). We were driven off the streets by Stalinist goons – and this was not an uncommon experience – Trotskyists were "open season" as declared by Buck and others against the Trotskyists, who were convicted by the supreme court of the Soviet Union no less, as being agents of Hitler – as I think I said in an earlier tape, that was established in order to justify the crushing of the Spanish Revolution.

So it was documented as a fact in the minds of many CPers. But when this 20<sup>th</sup> Congress came, there was confusion in the ranks of the Communist Party. They were a little more open, but that still hung on. At the meeting where Penner's book was reviewed, it was less than a year before the Ontario organizer of the CP turned to me at a rally at Allan Gardens and said I was an agent of the RCMP – after I was just winding up a 7 or 8-years struggle in the courts in defence of the rights of the Left in Canada, against the RCMP "dirty tricks."

*WR: Do you remember some of the details of the 1956 Krushchev revelations – the impact around the CP – did you move around that movement?*

Yes, we did – as a matter of fact, we were inspired by the responses in other sections of the communist movement. In Britain, there was a mass exodus of leading and very able people from the Communist Party, into the Trotskyist movement. One of the most important phenomena we have to recognize was the demoralization and disintegration of potential dissidents who were in the CP. But in Britain, a core of them went over to the Trotskyist movement – and we had hoped that such a situation would help (a repeat) take place in Canada – and of course there were important elements in the CP in Canada who did reconsider some of these questions. Salsberg, who had been an MLA for many years – over the years, he had been an independent-minded person, you know, who had taken positions of his own, and he had such prestige in the Jewish labor movement – he was a very experienced unionist – I think he was the Party's trade union director at the CLC conventions over many years – he always took independent positions – acceptable to the leadership because they never settled accounts with him – they never expelled him – it was rumored at one time he was a Trotskyist – a (*rumor*) planted by the CP brass, but not without foundation – he had open, dissident opinions in the framework of communism generally.

So, I went to see Salsberg at that time – I was hoping we could pick up some of these people and we could re-consolidate and re-align revolutionary forces in Canada. Salsberg was as usual his affable self, of course, and I had some discussions with him – at one time he told me "you know, Ross, in this room where you and I are now talking – his apartment – he said, you know, we had a meeting of the leadership of the Communist Party of Canada – our current in it, and he said, "in this room, one of the fellows turned and said, to the rest of us, you know we have a majority of the leading body in the party" – "and somebody else said 'yes, we have it, but what would we do with it?' " They were completely out-manuevered, and Buck had rallied the Ukrainian elements and other elements against them, and they didn't see any perspective for themselves. That was the common process in many of these crises, co-called "crises" in the communist movement – the **big** process was one of dissipation of

the best elements, and the loss of the best elements – not many of them were prepared to re-align themselves with a small, harassed group which they themselves had participated in the defaming of. So, while Salsberg was friendly and polite, and amicable – he wasn't going anywhere, and he's still hanging on – he's now an elderly man of course, older than I (*chuckles*). (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: (Question on re-orientation of left forces)*

I would have to say that (was so). There was one attempt to re-consolidate something – that was around Fergus McKeen – but its scope, I do not know – he was in B.C. – the provincial leader of the BC CP – Malcolm Bruce came over to us, but he had left the Canadian Communist Party earlier – he was one of the early founders of the CP of Canada – and of course, Max Armstrong came over to us – so some persons who had been leaders of the CP – had been leaders, years before, started to gravitate towards us – and we assimilated some of them, like Max Armstrong – and there were a few others like that – but generally, the Communist Party was disintegrating – that's what happened, that slow process. The CCF-NDP had no attractivity to the CP – the people of the CP, even though their policies were not differentiated from right-wing reformists, they considered themselves to be revolutionaries – in a romantic, emotion sense – a connection with the first breakthrough in Russia, you know, against imperialism (...)

## **The Spanish Civil War and The Depression**

*WR: Was the first real international issue Spain?*

Yes, the Trials were tied into it, you see

*WR: You'll come onto that later. Can you tell me about what kind of people they were. Why would they be interested about something like Spain – here they are right on the edge of survival themselves, unemployed.*

Exactly it, they're unemployed. You know young persons in York Township, single unemployed youth, couldn't get any welfare, any aid – there was no funds available for them, they had to stay with their families and share their pitiful dole – well, it was called “relief” – they had to share that with their brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers, or they had to get out. Well many of them got out because there was not much for their families, so they got out – and they became an important radical force in the Canadian society.

*WR: Were they radicals, and not embittered or disillusioned, like sometimes they refer to the Depression as “ten lost years”?*

Well, it was the beginning of class consciousness, I would say, on a broad scale the depression was a big factor in the radicalization of the Canadian people. And the best elements came to socialism, on the basis of how capitalism doesn't work, and condemned them to joblessness, and a life of despair. That's what the more able persons concluded – they became committed anti-capitalists – it was the beginning of the radical movement – it was the beginning of the CIO. I would say that the unemployed movement had a big impact on the CIO – although they were the workers who were organizing in auto and in steel – nonetheless they were the fathers, and brothers and sisters of unemployed workers, so the whole radicalization was tied up into the rise of the CIO, and the unemployed movement, which was a big movement – but a chaotic movement of course because everybody was trying to get out of it (*by getting a job*) – it wasn't a movement that built leadership, but it carried on vigorous struggles – and so workers started to feel a class-consciousness ...

*WR: Can you tell me about the unemployment work – tell me about any meetings you attended?*

Well, I got to know the leader of the unemployed movement in York Township – his name was

Montague – a veteran and a brilliant speaker, a popular agitator. I went to the meetings, although I was not unemployed – because my comrades were unemployed and active in the movement – we ran some candidates in the Township elections, and the unemployed movement was very much involved in politics, because of course they were trying to get better conditions for workers at large – a great body of workers who were listening to them, and wanting to know what's to be done about this situation. So it was a big influence. I went into the youth movement which also was a part of the unemployed movement, but not so important because the youth became mature very quickly (*laughs*).

As unemployed, they became class conscious. And that's where I met Beattie and a fellow named Beckett and some other persons who were interested in Spain. And, there was a debate in the unemployed movement about the policy of the Communist Party, for instance which was calling for food to go to Spain – whereas I as a student – I identified myself as working-class, completely – there was a big debate about what kind of aid should go to Spain – should it be peas, and beans and food, or should it be guns? Here was Mussolini sending guns and military equipment – planes to the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the fascists and I thought it was very necessary that Canada should break its neutrality under the leadership of Roosevelt, who had a policy of neutrality – neutrality, which of course was favorable to the rise of fascist power in Spain. So these became matters of concern and interest – and as I said before I went to the Spartacist Youth League where they had classes on Marxist economic theory and matters of this type. So now where are we going?

(...) Like, I participated in the activities of the Workers Party, York Township Branch, and the main substance of discussion, and major controversies, were what's to be done? And the unemployed movement became a big factor in its life. Not the union movement, because the union movement scarcely existed at that time in York Township because workers had no jobs – they weren't subject to the influence of the unions, which were only becoming mass industrial unions – only in the making at that time. So the unemployed movement was the main one. I remember about the discussions among the comrades what our policy should be – whether we wanted cash relief – I'm trying to think now – what were the issues.

We had big mobilizations, for instance in a park in York Township just off Rogers Road called Coronation Park on which Township offices were built – that at one time was an encampment of unemployed youth. They couldn't get welfare, they couldn't get any aid to live – some of them married so they could get relief – but workers didn't want to marry in order to get relief – they wanted jobs – so what they did was to build huts in the ground – burrowed in the ground and put a roof over them with planks and raincoats, and they lived there for a period – that was an active demonstration and appeal to the public that there should be relief and welfare for single unemployed – I remember that very distinctly because it was a shocking experience – that working class youth would go into the ground – like you see the peasantry who have just come in to the cities in Latin America, on the outskirts of Lima, and places like that – that was prevalent in York Township for a period.

But I really didn't get involved in the unemployed movement because I managed to get a job (*laughs*) – you know everybody was not unemployed, the country still operated, and if you had certain skills and certain education, you had a leg up, to get the job – so it so happened I always had a job – I worked at a couple of plants in York Township – I worked at Kodak, at First Box, and I tried to help unions to (organize) those places. I worked at Canada Packers and I made a real effort to bring the union into Canada Packers – none of these places were organized yet. Subsequently Canada Packers was organized by the Packinghouse Workers – (by) Dowling.

## **The Spanish Civil War again**



*WR: Before we get into the Second World War can we can talk a bit about how the debate around the Spanish Civil War -- was it the same kind of blank wall that you hit there?*

D: Oh yes, people identified with the Spanish Revolution – not so much with the Revolution, which I identified with, but with the democratic cause, because Franco violated the parliamentary results, he destroyed the parliamentary democratic machine in Spain – and of course many people came to identify with this, but it was on a low plane, you know – they didn't identify with the Revolution – they didn't know a revolution was taking place in Spain, which was up at the front, which Stalin murdered, but they thought it was a popular struggle which they identified with – so the CCF, the bourgeois press, (were) partisans with Spain – so there was a broad general support of it.

Bethune added to this as a doctor, and his mobile blood bank – this appealed to the ideals of broad layers of the population. But I was a revolutionary, and I was faced with attempting to explain to people what was really happening in Spain – that it was really being defeated, that the Spanish civil war was being smashed. I stood with Orwell's book *Homage to Catalonia* and Trotsky's defence of the anarchists, and the Left in Spain, and the Trotskyist defence of the Revolution, because there were revolutionary forces – Trotskyist revolutionary forces, in Spain. So we were supporting the Revolution. This got a certain support also, I must say, now.

There was another group in Toronto, called the League for a Revolutionary Socialist Party, which was a split-off from the Workers Party of Canada. This was led by a fellow by the name of William Khrem and a group of young radicals. They identified very much with Spain. Khrem had gone over early to Spain – he was an articulate person, he was a linguist, and he, I think, at one time ran the POUM\* radio service, he was a translator of Spanish into English very well, so he administered the radio service put out by the Spanish revolutionaries. He was subsequently arrested by the Communist Party who controlled the police, and we had a big fight to win his release. He was imprisoned, and there was a great danger he would be murdered like (*anarchist leader*) Andres Nin was, and other revolutionaries were. So this group brought over many posters from Spain, particularly the posters of the CTN and the Five, which were powerful works of graphic art – I remember going to a display of these. (\**Workers Party of Marxist Reunification – leading anarchists*).

And Spain became a matter of concern – but of concern to revolutionaries – a limited number – the broad layers identified with the cause in general, against fascism. And of course, as we moved toward the Second World War, there were attempts to equate the Spanish experience as a preliminary, a dress-rehearsal of World War Two – which it was in an indirect way. But Spain was defeated, and the issue disappeared from the arena, and the Second World War became the big issue. Our party, the Trotskyist movement, opposed the Second World War – opposed Canada's participation.

### Part 3: Antiwar and in the Army

*Ross:* Okay let's talk about the War (*World War 2*).

So when the War broke out, of course the Left was illegalized – I started to say earlier that Canadian Trotskyists were declared illegal – I haven't had a chance to look through the archives but I have a recollection that the Canadian Trotskyist movement was **read out** – declared to be illegal, by I think Governor Bruce – I seem to recall reading in the press that we were (*declared*) a subversive organization – if not an enemy organization – a subversive organization, and of course the Communist Party was declared illegal – so – this was a tremendous thing – for instance, they passed regulations – I don't know what they were in Ontario or whether they were federal – it was probably an implementation of the Canada defence regulations, but our press was declared an illegal paper, and we weren't able to get it printed. (*Voice emphasis*)

I remember that Birney was the editor at the time, and the paper didn't come off the press – it was all set, and just as it was going to be run off, the printer decided that he had to obey the law or he'd lose his ability to function as a press – so (the paper) didn't come out – it stopped appearing – this was a blow to a small group when its press can't come out – we subsequently got equipment to print it. We printed it – we set it by hand and we printed it – but it was a feeble version of a serious paper. Aside from the problems of circulation, the mechanical problems being declared illegal, the material was not very good. (*See Subject files W13-2: Socialist Action 1938-42 and W12: Periodicals 1938-42 –Ed.*). Yes, I got involved in that; I helped the comrades bring the material together to set the paper and to print it, and I helped run it off – I forget what kind of machine it was – a type I'd never been acquainted with before – I helped run it off.

### The outbreak of World War 2

*WR: And Birney?*

Birney left, Birney was already gone – I'm not sure of the exact circumstances, but he sent a note – slipped it underneath the door – and told the comrades who were trying to stay in the movement that he flushed out – he was through – he made some kind of declaration – I read it sometime or rather, but it was not a serious political statement – it was a cowardly retreat from the positions he'd held before.

*WR: This was after the War was declared?*

Declared – yes

*WR: He started to edit the first issue of the illegal paper and then he left?*

I think he left the movement. He made a public declaration and a rather shameful one, but (*laughing*) he was the best of his level of intellectuals, you know, and this type of persons left the movement – I don't know what repercussions it had on other sections of the radicals. For instance, the anarchists were arrested. I remember reading in the press a couple of headlines that the police broke into the homes of a couple of anarchists and found parts – parts, mind you – of a revolver, taken as evidence that they were subversive – and that they were dangerous – I remember those persons – a couple of fine persons, I forget their names now – a fellow by the name of Arthur Bartell or Bartelloti, an Italian comrade. His home was broken into and they found these parts of a revolver – so they were framed or harassed and depicted as violent and dangerous radicals. So the atmosphere was extremely hostile and the power was riding high – the RCMP was riding high – the police instruments were.

Well, with my generation I was faced with – I'll talk about the army – I won't want to go into Birney – I

don't want to do a job on Birney. He's irrelevant to the picture –he did some good things, you know. When I say he sold out the movement, its critical principles, the movement wasn't of great consequence in size and forces, and there was no great pressure to hold him to it, which was *our* weakness, and his own weakness combined, and he disappeared from the radical milieu, as far as we were concerned. So persons like myself tried to carry on on the basis of principles – so we published this paper, underground, for a while, and had great difficulty in circulating it – but the next big problem that confronted the working class – big social problem – was the War, and Canadian participation in the War. As I started to say earlier, the radicals were declared illegal. (*Speech emphasis*)

The Japanese were wrenched off, their businesses taken from them – oh yes, I remember going through B.C. and I came to Greenwood, which was an important mining community in BC and when I was going across Canada I came to this town in BC – I looked up – there all kinds of kids and women in the doors and windows, waving and looking out – these were Japanese women and children who'd been wrenched off the BC coast and penned into these camps to work in sweat jobs – terrible – I didn't know what it was – I saw it – it had gotten no publicity – I'm sure there was a ban to publicize – the press wouldn't publish – the press cooperated of course with the Defence of Canada regulations and all this – so I remember seeing all these Japanese Canadians in these towns, and I learned later that they'd been scattered across Canada, and brought into Northern Ontario to work on the railways and in the woods – I read about that but I saw it in Greenwood.

### **With his class cohort in the Canadian Army**

Okay – so – along with my generation I was ultimately brought into the army – this was the devious way that the King government imposed conscription on Canada – there was going to be opposition to it, of course they knew that, and there was, considerable opposition, but they defused it. What they did was – you were conscripted for 30 days, at training –just for training, with military equipment, etc., only preparatory for the longer range, because everybody knew the War was not a transitory experience. Then they increased it for three months – then they increased it for the duration of the emergency, and then it was broken down again – this was a device to put the heat on Canadian youth to volunteer. If you're going to be conscripted, why not volunteer and get better positions in the army – more safe positions in the army, more tolerable positions – join the air force, you know, the elite in the armed forces.

So these methods of pressure were developed by the government in order to send Canada into the War, and overcome the resistance. First 30 days, then 3 months, then the duration – then the army was divided, you see, there were persons who were conscripted and there were persons who were volunteers – well of course they built up the volunteers by a process of conscription! If you are going to be conscripted, you might as well volunteer. You could only volunteer for the army at that stage but people who wanted to evade conscription generally volunteered for the air force – you needed qualifications to get into the air force.

### **Dowson's initial role in the pre-war movement**

*WR: When was this?*

What? I'm trying to think because it must have been very early in my involvement in the movement – it would be about '36 – somewhere around there – but then the War came – and so the question of the fate of the movement – which was impelled by the deterioration of the cadre, and the difficulties of the War – there was a crisis in the leadership.

It was then when the crisis developed that I started to move in – not too consciously, but with a sense of responsibility to the movement – I had not played any role of any substance in the movement before the War – I was a comrade, an activist, but I never took any leadership role – but with the War, I helped put the underground paper out – that's when I started to get involved – we put out an underground paper against the War. I started to circulate it; then I made a trip across Canada and started to become more and more involved in the leadership of the movement – for instance, the paper was key, of course – it was a primitive paper but it was quite key – it pulled the cadre together.

When I made the trip I met all the comrades and that convinced me more and more – so a sorting out took place among the very small cadre – and then a reconstitution of the movement took place – new people came in, so the movement became reconstituted in 19... well I don't have the date of the conference (*documents at W12, October 1946 -Ed.*) – we had a national conference, a very modest one. We brought in Bradley, and some new people from Vancouver who we recruited – I think we may have had Jean-Marie Bédard very early – but we reconstituted the movement just at the close of the War.

*WR: (Question about the date of the founding conference)*

Well we have some photographs of it (*See the personnel at photo W18-1948-2 -Ed.*) – my memory is very vague, but I have a visualization now of the conference – it was held at 87 King Street West, right across from the (Toronto daily newspaper) *Star* – it was a small room, but the room was able to hold the delegates, and the occasion was the CLC convention in Quebec City, where Paddy Stanton made his speech against the War, against the No-Strike Pledge (*the major campaign of the Canadian Communist Party - Ed.*) – I think that's where we met Jean-Marie Bédard on a more consolidated basis, and the persons he had around him, a fellow by the name of Valliancourt who worked with Bédard and became a leader in the CCL, and we had a couple of other comrades from Montreal who were unionists – it was a beginning – formally, when you could say the (*Canadian*) section (*of the Fourth International*) was reconstituted in Toronto right after the War (*documents at W12, October 1946 -Ed.*)

*WR: How many people were there?*

I would say there were not more than about 10 or 12 people, that's all. But we had other members, you know – the Toronto section didn't try to flood it, you know – we tried to recognize the leading comrades and they established the relationship – for instance, I was considered a leading comrade at that time, but vis-a-vis Bédard and Bradley and Whalen – we recruited two leading woodworkers – Tom Bradley and Whalen. Bradley was the trade union organizer for the CP in the Vancouver area – as a matter of fact, more than the Vancouver area – in BC – he was probably more – but he was the trade union organizer in the Communist Party and he broke and came to the Trotskyist movement – exactly how I'm not sure what his background was – I remember his wife was a very fine organizer, a very capable person, and they knew Whalen, who was an up-and-coming union militant in the Woodworkers – and they built quite an effective faction in the Woodworkers, which was a Stalinist-dominated union – very bureaucratically manipulated by the CP – eventually their caucus won the majority and it led to a split in the Woodworkers and creation of the Canadian Independent Woodworkers which won the majority away from the Stalinists – quite a remarkable trade union development – I'd have to read up on it. (*See references to Bedard, Bradley & Whalen in "The IWA in Canada" by Neufeld & Parnaby, New Star, 2000; also "One Union in Wood" by Lembcke & Tattam, 1984*)

## **Earle Birney**

*WR: Among the literary people, there was Earle Birney?*

I was just going to say – Earl Birney became the editor of *Canadian Forum*, which was an important

cultural journal in Canada. Many of the persons who were around the League for Social Reconstruction found expression in *Canadian Forum*. It's quite changed now – it's the most tepid of all the cultural journals. The new radicalization has found other ways of expression elsewhere, like *This Magazine*. But at that time *Canadian Forum* came under the editorship of Birney. Just how that took place I do not know. Birney was a member of the Trotskyist movement at that time.

*WR: What period?*

Well I guess it would be '37-'38 – somewhere around there. But I remember reading articles in *Canadian Forum* which reflected the influence that Birney had and the influence of the developing unease around the coming world war – because everyone knew the war was coming, you know, long before it broke over our heads – we were reluctantly sucked into it.

*WR: Was he part of the Trotskyist movement when he took over the editorship of Canadian Forum?*

Well I'm sure the comrades who were in the centre of Toronto who he was acquainted with knew, and must have somehow agreed to it – thought it was useful. But Birney became, quite early – an eminent poet, a man of culture and sophistication. He went over to see Trotsky, Birney did. And I remember the *Vanguard*, the press of the Workers Party, carried an extensive interview that Birney had with Trotsky – he went over with someone else, I forget who it was, and they had an extensive interview with Trotsky. (See the photo at W18-1935-4 and extensive articles by Trotsky in the *Vanguard* 1935-36 at W4-Periodicals – Ed.) And that got publicity – there was an interest in Trotsky, particularly among intellectuals – and through persons like Birney, but not in the general public – we weren't a cultural force, the Trotskyist movement – we were in the working-class movement – **very** working class, the unemployed movement, it was attempting to be working-class. (*speech emphasis*)

*WR: Birney wrote a book about some his experiences – “Down the long table” which he wrote during the Cold War – a lot of it talks about the 1930s – did you have any sense of its accuracy when you read the book ?*

(*Laughs*) It's an outrageous book, in my opinion. I wrote a review of it for the Trotskyist press which I was editing at the time because the book had some impact – *Down the long table*. Birney was well-known, respected as a poet, and I imagine he must have written on other cultural matters, you see. So I read this book – it's a staggering book – I considered Birney repudiated – used that occasion to repudiate his radical past. It is an adaptation to the Cold War. As a matter of fact – I'm not sure when the book came out (1955, McClelland & Stewart –Ed.), but before the book came out Birney had already broken from the Canadian Trotskyist movement – he came out in support of the War, whereas the Trotskyist movement retained its loyalty to its international program – its program of attempting to intervene in the process of the war, so that socialism would come out of it – as it did out of World War One.

We visualized that the crisis that would develop in the process of the War would lead to radicalization of extensive sectors of the working class, in some countries, and of course it did. But not to the extent that we had hoped. You know, out of the war came the Chinese Revolution – a little later – but out of the war the Yugoslav struggle – the Yugoslavs took power – and there were other events of significance, of course, but (...)

*WR: You were talking about Birney and before the War was announced he supported the War*

I wouldn't say he did it soon – everyone was under the gun – we were publishing a press at the time – we were opposing the War – I remember reading our press – I wasn't involved in the publication of the paper, again being in York Township and not in the centre, and the cadre was small, Birney played an important role and became editor of the Trotskyist press – and then the press collapsed. As a matter of

fact, the revolutionary forces disintegrated, as the War broke out. The group that I mentioned before, the League for a Revolutionary Workers Party – they disappeared! They scattered their forces. I participated with a core of comrades, tried to hold the basic Trotskyist force together, and we published an underground paper, which opposed the War (*See Socialist Action 1938-42 - W4-Periodicals*) You couldn't oppose the War without the threat of being sent to a concentration camp. You read the paper in the early days of the War and you read where some worker said something in a beer parlour, and somebody reported him to the police, and he was arrested – he was on charges.

## **The Stalinist Communist Party and the War**

And of course the Communist Party leadership fled the country – I think Buck and Stewart Smith, and others, fled the country, along with the Field group, this Trotskyist current. So in the first period the movement was paralysed. But I helped, with some other working-class types, to pull together modest forces, and to start the process of re-organizing, re-consolidating the movement – and we had to do that with the paper – it was the only means we could do (*anything*) – we were a small underground movement.

Dog Days of the radicalization, because the War overwhelmed everything, you see. Aside from the threat of being sent to jail, nobody wanted to listen to you – people supported World War Two – Canadian workers supported it – (*or*) they didn't want it, but it seemed to be an inevitable challenge before them – and it sucked everybody into it.

*WR: The Communist Party was opposed to the war?*

Just for a conjunctural period (*during the short-lived abortive and treacherous “Stalin-Hitler Pact” – Ed.*)

*WR: Were we able to work with them or around them? Did they have any success?*

They were underground – I never saw their paper until I went to the reference library one day and I got to know one of the librarians and he showed me some odd papers he'd come across, and then I realized what they were – I identified them for the public library – as an underground paper the CP published when it was opposed to the War – it was a short period. See, Stalin made a pact with Hitler. This was not some conjunctural little experience – Stalin *meant* to carry out the Pact – he *did* carry out the Pact – he didn't defend the Soviet Union – this is going to come out in the Moscow (Trials) revelations, about Stalin. But Stalin left Russia open to the German invasion – he believed that it was going to adhere to the principles of the Pact – and the German Army moved right into Russia, moved over Russia in a bold scale without opposition from the Red Army. Of course, the Red Army had been decapitated by Stalin, in the Moscow Trials. One of the Trials had as its main victims, the leading officers of the Red Army – they were all destroyed as “agents of fascism.” (*speech emphases*)

*WR: Sorry – In the United States the Communist Party was building support for collective efforts against Hitler – then all of a sudden it switched its position (from against) Hitler\* ... which led to massive demoralization in the CP. Did that happen in Canada?*

(*\*the Stalin-Hitler Pact was signed allowing plans for World War 2 to proceed at the same time Stalin concurrently purged the Soviet Red Army in his personal –bureaucratic-- loyalty witchhunt, thus decimating the armed defence of the Soviet Union – Ed.*)

It happened, but the CP was underground. You see, Canada is quite remarkable – unlike Britain, and the United States, the radicals were declared “illegal.” The British Trotskyist movement opposed the War, but functioned – all during the War – I remember my young brother (*Hugh Dowson*) went to England,

with the Canadian Air Force, and he worked with the British Trotskyists, who ran in a by-election – their leaders ran as candidates in Britain, opposed to the War – in the midst of the War – (*where*) the great British liberatory tradition of working-class rights (*had been*) established.

But in Canada the people who opposed the War were really squashed, and we circulated the paper by putting the paper into library books – I went into the library and looked up the radical books which I thought radical people would read, and I slipped copies of the paper in it – and we did it by word of mouth, to people we knew, who may also have been watched – for instance, any mail going to Europe was no doubt scrutinized by the RCMP – but we've subsequently got an idea of the totalitarian instruments of the Canadian government had at its disposal when the revelations of the RCMP came out – you know, the RCMP took over the Post Office in many ways – they had access to anything that came through – they were informed – subsequently it was learned that the RCMP had a person established in the Post Office – its scrutinized foreign-addressed mail, and mail coming in from foreign countries.

I had to start writing carefully when the Canadian Trotskyist forces gathered its forces again – I had to write carefully to comrades in Vancouver and Montreal and places, because we had reason to believe that the mail was being watched. We had nothing to hide – we were not embarrassed – we wanted to say our views – nonetheless, there was a danger that persons might be arrested, and they would disappear.

*WR: Was this the first time the RCMP who would later come to play an important role in your political life?*

Well I never met them face-to-face, you see. Later on, we *did!* They openly infiltrated, in the period '71-'72-'73 – they were underground, when they carried on their dirty work surreptitiously – they were not supposed to even be there, you know – we didn't know this existed (*see W6-1980- Ross Dowson vs RCMP – Ed*). We met (*them in previous*) episodes, like at Riverdale Park, the anti-fascist demonstrations – the police moved in against the Left in those periods – at Christie Pits – someone has written a book on this – (*the 1930s in Toronto – Ed.*)

*WR: The anti-semitic riots*

Well, they were anti-fascist. (...) When the War broke out, our connections were smashed. People were afraid to correspond, to put things on paper. I remember it was decided that we had to take some personal initiatives to re-establish some connections – so I made a tour of Canada, very early in the War, to try to pull things together and get the movement on the road again. The pre-War period (*Dowson is referring to the period prior to his being drafted – Ed.*) was a demoralizing period and I had connections and I met other persons and I toured – I hitch-hiked – you know, Canada is a recent phenomenon – when I did that, there was no Trans-Canada highway. In order to get to Vancouver by highway, I had to go down to the States, or take the train – we couldn't afford the train, – too expensive for our tastes – so I hitch-hiked across the top (*of the US*) via Chicago (*and through Oregon because in south-west BC*) the Hope-Princeton highway hadn't been built. (...) At any rate I made a trip across Canada, and tried to pull the connections together

### **Dowson's 1941 trip across Canada**

*WR: Just after the War started?*

Yes, before I got picked up into the Army, etc. So I made this trip and pulled together the connections, then I started a series of correspondence and we started to get moving together. In 1945, just before the end of the war, we started to publish an independent paper again, with myself, and Dick Whiteside and

Murray Dowson were editors of it, for a short period (*Dowson refers to Labor Challenge 1945-1952 – organ of the newly established Revolutionary Workers Party – Ed.*)

*WR: Can we talk about this trip you took across the country?*

Well, Canada was a pretty undeveloped country then. If people think Canada has the characteristics of undeveloped countries in Latin American – it really (*had them*) then, as the Trans-Canada highway wasn't built and I had to go down into the States to get to Vancouver – I had to go down at Trail, I guess it was. Let me see now – Okay, I met nearly all the conscious Trotskyites in Canada at that time – I met them all pretty well, and we prepared the basis for publishing a paper.

*WR: in 1939?*

I made that tour in '40 – '41 maybe even –

*WR: When the Trotskyist movement was virtually non-existent?*

No, almost non-existent.

*WR: what did you do after that?*

Well, of course, I was in the Army – this is rather amusing – I don't know if its useful, but I had an experience in the Army with my generation. Anybody of my age, of course, either volunteered in the Army or was drafted in the Army.

### **Dowson is conscripted**

At any rate, I was conscripted. I think I was in one of the early batches, ripe for military training – but it so happened that, unknown to me, the doctor in our community was friendly to our family – he knew our family was dependent upon me to get an income, and there was only a couple of us working, and he gave me a “category E” – it wasn't completely a forgery – I had “fallen arches”, “low arches”, I had a “cardiac murmur” – but I was not eligible to be rejected as “category E” – the doctor did a favor – I suppose that happened across Canada – doctors being human tried to implement the orders of the government with some sensitivity to the objective situation that people were confronted with – so I was stalled – I never got into the army for a while, as it was being built up.

Then suddenly they changed the regulations, and they changed the stages – so eventually I became eligible – in a very strange way, but not uncommon I would think.

I came back from a trip across to the West Coast, and I thought I would get into the War industry – where there's jobs opening up, and I took a government training course – I had not developed any skill – I was just a student, I had worked in Canada Packers – unskilled rough labor – so I had an opportunity to learn a skill – so the government opened up, I guess they were 30 days – a short time of training, and they set up schools, so I went to one, and another brother of mine did likewise. So I used that training to develop a sort of background as a worker in a shop, and by deception I got a boss to take me on as a tool and die maker, a machine operator – so I managed to get a job. But I couldn't get into the shops I wanted to get into – I wanted to get into a shop where I could learn a skill and a trade, where I could play a role in the radical movement, in the labor movement.

And so, when I came back from the West Coast, I had to think about what I am going to do and what kind of a job I would get. Well I soon found out that the government was using the job situation and conscription in order to put pressure on workers to join up, and I found that I couldn't get in, and the corporations were collaborating with the government – I found I couldn't get into the main shops where I could hope to learn a trade without having a discharge – so the bosses demanded a discharge to any



worker who came to the employment office in hand – he had to have a discharge, or he wouldn't hire him – the jobs I tried to get.

Well, I had to face it – I'm not going to get into those shops, then. It was (*decided for me*). The government controlled the hiring situation, you see – so there was nothing for me to do except – maybe I can get a discharge. So we talked it over with my family and others, so I concluded maybe I would get a discharge – after all, I am a “category E”-- I was characterized by the doctor – I didn't know he was a friend of our family and looked kindly upon our family and its needs to make out that I was in “category E,” and would be rejected by the army. I went down and volunteered. They accepted me (*laughs*). I'm sure it must have happened elsewhere, because I was opposed to the War – completely, absolutely opposed to the War, but here I am in the army! And I volunteered! There are also persons in the army who are conscripts. I am an unusual person because I volunteered into the army – a patriot, presumably.

At any rate, I got in the army. I took basic training, took advanced training, and then I was offered a promotion. So I said “what should I do?” I knew that Canadian youth were being slaughtered in the early days of the War at Ypres\* – it was a fiasco for the Canadian people, it was a blood-letting. The pressure on the Canadian government (*was for it*) to open the “Second Front” – one of the big factors in this was the Soviet Union – which was being bled by the German Army, the invasion army, in a scorched earth policy, and the Soviet Government was pressing for an opening of the “Second Front.”

*(\*Ross here is referring to the slaughter in Northern Belgium in World War One. The disastrous military blunders of World War Two he refers to here is the desperate evacuation of 338,000 Allied troops from Dunkirk across the English Channel under Nazi bombardment. The memory of the mass casualties of Canadian soldiers at Dieppe in August 1942 which saw 3300 killed in one battle was undoubtedly also in mind. These bloody battles are not to be confused with the heavy loss of British troops at the Ypres-Comines Canal in May 1940. There were high Canadian casualties also Ypres in World War One, in April 1915 and April 1918 as well –Ed. Info from Wikipedia).*

So, the government capitulated to this pressure, and opened the second front with Ypres and this blood-letting. That's what Ypres was about – to *stop the pressure* for a second front. You see, the Canadian bourgeoisie were not so interested in supplying troops, but they wanted the war contracts, the military contracts, and Canada became a great arsenal. I remember there was an effective cartoon, I guess it appeared in *The Telegram* – one of the Toronto papers – but Gad Horowitz published a cartoon in the end papers of his book – what is it called?

*WR: (Roberts replies:) “Canadian labor – and radical politics”*

Yes, you should look at the end paper – an interesting cartoon – it shows the Peace Bridge in the Windsor-Detroit area, and it's flooded with trucks bringing American equipment up to Canada, because Canada was used as a front to get around the regulations about participation in the War by America – America hadn't joined the War in the early days – so they used Canada to supply the British military machine, via Canada – American material came. But there was a cartoon in the end papers of that paper which shows Charles Millard – and someone else – it's complicated, but worth telling – the Canadian labor movement, unlike the movement elsewhere, opposed the War – thanks to the influence of the Québécois! – who didn't consider that this war had anything to do with them, anything to do with Canada – they were Canadians (*“les Canadiens” –Ed.*) – they were Québécois – it's a British War, an English war. So – I'm trying to pull this thing together.

## Canadian labor and World War 2

*WR: This cartoon has Charles Millard of the CIO...*

Yes, under a bridge, with bombs, with another tabloid “Red” who was marked “Trotskyist” – and they were going to blow the bridge up and block the aid which was presumably going to Britain to the Allies in Europe. So it was a smear of the Trotskyists who opposed the War but who didn't oppose the military machine as such – we were opposed to the war politically, and Millard, who was head of the union movement, was opposed to the No Strike Pledge – you have to get a real picture of the scene – the fury of the War pressure – because you see there, the Communist Party was supporting the War by supporting the No Strike Pledge (*in support of the Soviet Russia's demands for the “second front” – Ed.*)

In Canada the labor movement was reluctant to support the War – very reluctant. The CCF had a long tradition of pacifism – Woodsworth said he would never support any imperialist War – it's in the *Regina Manifesto* – that Canada should not support any war in the interests of corporate wealth – corporate elite. So, the Canadian labor movement, faced (*with this*) at its congress, was under pressure to identify with the War. The delegates rejected it. The No Strike Pledge was the symbol of submission to the pressure of the War drive.

The American (*labor*) movement was gung-ho for the No Strike Pledge, ultimately – as a matter of fact I don't think the Canadian labor movement ever repudiated its rejection of the No Strike Pledge – to my knowledge – we should check it out sometime. At that convention which some of my friends participated in, particularly Paddy Stanton, who was the president of the Prince Rupert (*Northwest BC*) Labor Council – he spoke out against supporting the No Strike Pledge. Pat Conroy opened the floor for him, when he made a speech. I'm only saying this by hearsay – I don't have it (*the reference*) handy. But Paddy Stanton said to pledge ourselves to the capitalist class of No Strikes was to hamstringing the labor movement, telling the bosses “do what you like.”

So – he referred to Lenin, who carried out a revolution in the midst of World War One, a “strike” in the midst of War (*October 1917!*) – a revolution is a form of strike of mass proportions – he referred to this, and got applause among the delegates, at the CCL convention. He got applause and I understand from Stanton that the leadership of the union movement opened the door for him to make a speech – sort of an understanding – because they were worried about the No Strike Pledge, which the CP was attempting to implement through the Canadian labor movement – and of course this is a critical question – can the labor movement pledge it will not strike – that's like (*pledging*) its demise. So the labor brass wouldn't take the stand but opened the door for Stanton to make this radical speech.

*WR: Who was Paddy Stanton – can you tell me about him?*

He was the leader of the Prince Rupert labor movement – the head of the Prince Rupert Labor Council – and his group of friends and associates were the main factor there. This labor council became pretty radical – he was a steelworker – a riveter, a steel bolt-maker, you know – and he was a well-known character in the Vancouver labor movement, but he went up to Prince Rupert because there were good jobs there at that time, and he became quite influential at that time – and Prince Rupert labor movement became a factor around this question of the No Strike Pledge.

I remember it at the time – I was involved – I didn't go down to the convention, but Stanton was in Toronto and I had some discussions with him – we probably worked out his speeches, etc., but he made a very powerful speech that attacked the commitment of the labor movement to a No Strike Pledge, and specifically attacked the – I guess it was (*known as*) the Labor Progressive Party at that time – the Communist Party – for its support of the No Strike Pledge.

Okay, so we're back to the workers in Canada getting into the army. Okay, well being a worker I got into it – you didn't have a chance to volunteer, you didn't have a chance to refuse – that's an established fact – if you refused you became what was known as a “zombie” – second-class citizens in the Canadian army – they were treated like scum. Some officers – social-patriots of the worst types, treated persons who were “zombies” as they called them, as pariahs, and so you had an army that was divided – you the army of the “zombies” and you had the army of the volunteers – a divided army – I'm sure no country in the world had such a phenomenon – but it was the problem of Quebec, and the anti-war sentiment, which (was) prominent in Canada – primarily inspired by Quebec – and the isolationism of certain forces in American society.

So I had to go out and get a job, and I think I told you I was accepted when I applied – I don't think I did – I wanted to get into some strategic industries from the point of view of doing unionism, of trying to build the labor movement – during the war, and post-war. I had a long-range perspective. I was interested in playing a role and helping the labor movement get on its feet – because the labor movement underwent a big organization in this period, and I thought I could help this process. So I volunteered, expecting to be rejected.

### **Dowson in the Canadian Army**

Strange to say, I was not rejected. That's how I learned the doctor did a favor to our family. I was not rejected. They said “yes you have low arches, you haven't got flat feet, and I knew I had no trouble walking – and he said “you have a cardiac murmur but its marginal – very common among young people” – (...) well, you had elements, but they were putting people through – I don't know if you know George Groelch's famous cartoons which shows the doctors looking through the workers who were going through into the German army – he looks through them – they don't have hearts, they have false flat feet, they're just a number, and he stamps “approved” on the number – quite a savage cartoon against the medical profession in the service of the bourgeoisie – the German bourgeoisie in this case – so I am pulled into the army, and I go to Brantford.

I meet some interesting people in the army – I meet a fellow who was subsequently a leader of the Communist Party who had some doubts about the war, but went along with it, and who subsequently became a (city) controller in Hamilton – I can't remember his name. Of course, I started to circulate literature among the soldiers – carefully, I wasn't interested in going to prison, or jail, but I wanted to reveal my views – the army opened up the concept of a parliament in its own ranks – they had what you might call political action sessions in the army. Some officers were bold, and took advantage of it, and opened up discussion – what's the war about, what's happening in the world, etc. These were extremely important in the British army, because many of these parliaments came out against the war – in Britain – there were reports – I've seen them – of a parliament that even sent representations to a higher body in the British army – and they opposed the war.

I was in a much more less radical milieu – but I tried to present, as best I could, grounds for skepticism about the war and the whole post-war period – I tried to build up a consciousness of what the war was about, and its results would be. At any rate, they offered me a chance to learn more about the arts of war, and I thought, well, I'm going to go to Europe, probably, and there's going to be a revolution come out of the war. I was quite convinced – I was convinced by other people, I was convinced by the events of World War One, that a revolution would come out of the war, particularly in Europe, where the workers are very sophisticated and class-conscious and have a sense of their power – so – I wasn't completely wrong, you know – (*but*) a definitive revolutionary struggle did not take place except in one

or two countries.

In Yugoslavia, the working class of Yugoslavia under the leadership of (Marshall) Tito, took power – they led a guerrilla struggle against the King Peter of Yugoslavia, who had played around with fascists. Tito organized a partisan movement and led a revolution, which Stalin tried to sabotage. Tito talked about the role and their relationships with the Soviet Union, which was instrumental in supplying them with material and with food, etc. They were in the mountains, and the Soviet bureaucracy (*nevertheless – Ed.*) sabotaged the Yugoslav partisan movement – but the partisan movement prevailed.

There was (*also*) a revolutionary upsurge in Greece – it was crushed. There was an interesting article in the (*Canadian CP journal*) *The Tribune* – someone wrote a letter about the Greek CP just recently, which talked about how the Greek Communist Party betrayed the revolutionary possibilities, under the influence of Stalin. A personal letter which appeared in the pages of *The Tribune* – this came out of the “glasnost” revolution – (*Gorbachev's 1980s reform movement directed against Stalin's crimes in the Soviet Union – Ed.*) You see, (*there was*) the feeling that we've got to tell what happened, what really happened, you know.

(But) no revolution in Canada – but there was a great dissatisfaction – for instance, (*after*) I became a corporal – this is rather interesting – I opened the paper one day in Camp Borden where I was stationed, and they talked about Sicily – they're reporting a phase of the war – the Sicilian campaign – you know, nearly everybody who was in the platoon that I had trained with in Camp Borden a couple of months before, was killed in Sicily. I looked at it and I said “oh God, if I hadn't taken that Corporal's stripe I would have been killed. I didn't think in those terms at the time – but they were all wiped out, or a good number of them were wiped out. At any rate, after that, I also had an opportunity to become an officer. There was a big crisis in the Canadian armed forces, and the Allies –

*WR: At Camp Borden, were you there with the volunteers?*

I was with the volunteers – there were “zombies” in some parts of the camp.

*WR: With the volunteers – was there tensions between them?*

There must have been in some places, but I never saw that – there was no doubt there was tension, because the “zombies” were treated scandalously, and the officers were instrumental in doing that – and that's one of the reasons I said I can't be an officer in this army – aside from the cause, the aim of the army, we had a class division in the army, and the officers were basically the sons of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois. For instance if you were a university student, or a prof – and universities were much less accessible to the working class then, than they are now – you automatically became an officer – just automatically – it was a class position, an authoritative position in the army which was given to you on the basis of what class you came from, automatically. So at any rate, they offered me a commission – most of the officers were persons who wanted a softer life – maybe a shorter life (*the lower officer ranks suffering the greatest casualties in combat – Ed.*), but a softer life, maybe a shorter life, and they wanted the authority that goes with it.

I thought I should learn the arts of warfare – if I'm going to Europe, I may as well learn how to fight, and that's what we were told to do, you know, kill or be killed – you've got to learn how to fight. So, I thought, there's going to be a revolutionary struggle in Europe, I want to be part of that – I don't want my life to be wasted in an imperialist war (*out of*) which nothing comes – but another war! So I hoped that I could make this a war against wars, you know, so I took the commission, and I learned about the arts of war, all that I could – unlike many of the other officers, who were in it for the social life, and leisure, and privilege – and it was a privileged position – I learned everything I could, about

six-pounders, the trench-mortars, all of these things – I became perhaps one of their most-skilled officers but not a member of the permanent force, but officers who were trained in the early days of the war. But I did it because I thought it was advisable, and necessary, for socialism.

### **Dowson's Army exit**

So – I decided now I can't remain an officer in this army, which is riven with privilege and prejudice against other workers of Canada – so I resigned my commission – I told them, I don't want to be an officer, on the experience I've had as an officer – in the officer corps – I forget what they're called, but there is a group of officers who go around to the camps, and to any unit that's in action, even, to hear grievances of the troops. So I appealed to them and I said I want to hand in my commission. “Oh no you can't, but (we) can make it available for you to meet this officer corps, the upper strata, and you can appeal before them. They stalled me, several times; so eventually I went and told them “I told you I want to resign my commission and I'm dead serious and you can't deny me my right to appear before this group of officers. So eventually I met them in Camp Borden. I appeared before them, and I told them: I'm questioning the whole structure of the army, the class privileges that exist for officers, the “zombies” vs volunteers, the whole thing – and I want to resign.

Well – they started to threaten me – if you resign, we'll call you up again. I said “you do what you want – let me do what I want to do – I have the right to resign my commission.” So they said “we'll call you up immediately, and you will have to go through training and you'll be a private (*again*).” I said “that's fine with me – as a matter of fact, if I am going to go overseas, which is obvious, I want to be with the privates, I want to be with the regiment.” So – its funny-- they eventually let me resign, and they called me up. I went down to the Horse Palace, which is in Toronto where the persons who were called up were dispersed to the training camps, and they gave me another opportunity to somehow get out – “we'll give you an NCO's position” – anything – they wanted me to shut up. I said no, I wanted to go through the routine. I was an officer, but I wanted to go through the 30 days', or 90 days' training, so I was sent out to the camps – but of course as soon as I got into a camp, it got around – I didn't hide it among the officers, who were now officers of me, over me. I knew some of them because I'd trained some of them, and many of the NCO's, I trained, so I became a 'cause celebre,' a curio, an officer who's not, who was a competent officer but who's not one of them, and who's with the ranks – so people wanted to talk to me all the time. So I did my duty to my views, I expressed my views – my doubts about the war, about the structure of the army which reflects class society, etc., At any rate, while I was at Niagara-on-the-Lake, the war (...)

### **Canada in World War 2**

*WR: (garbled recording) ...Around VE Day*

Yes. The Canadian government is now not thinking of sending troops over to Europe, because it has sent considerable forces, and there was no demand for them – its very interesting, but there are many details. The Canadian army suffered no losses in its officer caste – it was getting plugged up with so many officers – there must be a certain ratio you know, you've got officers, you've got to have ranks. So anyway they had more officers than they could use, so thought of the brilliant idea of transferring Canadian officers to the British army – so they appealed to the Canadian officers to switch and join the British army, and they promised all kinds of (*things*) – if you get into the British army, you'll see officers are **officers**, not like here, where the troops don't understand their status – there's a real class division in the British army – they didn't use these words but that's what they said – so we were going into the life of “Lords” in the British army, so we volunteered. Strange to say, among all these officers who were presumably patriots, hardly any volunteered to go over to the British army – the Canadian

was much to be (*preferred? – laughs*) (*voice emphasis*)

WR: (*inaudible comment*)

But there were nearly no losses in the Canadian army, you see – until Ypres (*RD means to say Dunkirk, while the slaughter of Canadian soldiers occurred at Dieppe in August 1942 – see note above – Ed.*) came along – at any rate, I was in this over-surplus of Canadian officers, over here, over there – (*they needed*) to spread us around to “try to give us a little experience with the troops, etc.” – it was a farce (*laughs*). So when the Canadian army decided now that there was a labor shortage in Canada, at the same time as a surplus of officers, and there was a surplus of troops because Canadian troops were not useful, anymore, with VE Day already taken place – and as you know Canada only declared war against Germany – we were not in the Japanese front – for Canadian troops to go to Japan, (*they*) would have to volunteer, **again**, for another theatre of war – this was part of the attempt of the King government to minimize the opposition to this war, you see – we weren't committed to the war in the East of the globe. (*voice emphasis*)

### **Demobilized Dowson leads a struggle against being used as cheap Army labor**

**Nobody** volunteered to go to the war in Japan (*laughs*) (*except for a scattering volunteering for the air force in Burma –Eds*) – just as nobody volunteered to be an officer in the British army, nobody volunteered to be a private or anything else on the Japanese-front army – and of course there were no substantial Canadian troops in Japan – I don't think they recruited any – so, they had no success in it – at any rate, you see, there was a lot of opposition to the war, expressed in various ways (*voice emphasis*).

At any rate, there is pressure developing in the army to be demobilized – in the States, you know, there were big demonstrations in Guam and other places, where American troops, when the war was over, **demand**ed that they be released from the army – big riots and big demonstrations – well a similar thing took place in Britain among the Canadian troops – the Canadian troops were brought off the European continent, or didn't go further into the European continent – and they wanted to be demobilized. What the hell are we here for – there's no war – we're not at war, so we should be released. The army had the idea that you had to be released by seniority – well they rejected seniority in the unions for workers, they decided you had to have so much seniority, so many credits, allowed only to certain people – in which there is a certain amount of justice, of course – people who have been longer in the army should be out first (*voice emphasis*).

So they decided to release them in bits and drabs. Well, here I am in Canada, in the army – I think I was in Brantford at that time – no Niagara-on-the-Lake at that time. So what the government decided was, that the troops will be used for cheap labor. There was a real crisis in the Canadian economy – workers wouldn't take the shit-house jobs that they took during the Depression. You know, during the Depression which we talked about earlier, you'd take any job – it didn't matter – I would have worked in the (packinghouse) killing floor, but I worked in the meats, the refrigerated storage plant – I worked 12-hour shifts – terrible job, but you had to take them – I got good wages there because the government was worried about unionism – but they were terrible jobs.

But this happened more commonly as the war went on, and the government couldn't get workers to take certain types of jobs – for instance in the foundries, in the railway-track gang – the worst kinds of jobs – they couldn't get anyone to take them because there were job possibilities now and workers said “why should I take that crap” so even without unionizing.

## Ottawa's cheap army labor gambit

So I'm in the first group that the government decides to send to work on the railways. I'd never worked on railways – it was heavy work, you'd pick up one of those tamping bars – I don't know how heavy those bars are, but they're very heavy bars, solid bars of steel, used to jam the gravel under and between the ties – so I was in the first group – and we were going to be stationed at Oakville – that's the town I was trying to think of. So they tried to make this palatable to the troops. Guys who had been recruited to go into the army and go into war to kill other workers – but with a lot of heroics you know dressed around it – with sharp-shooters from the Soviet Union to show us how the Russians won the great anti-fascist war, how they used to do this (...)

I'm in this group – I'm sent to work on the railway gang, but I was with a bunch of other, younger workers – I was now older than the mass coming into the army, among the volunteers, you see, and I was never stationed with a “zombie” unit – I was with volunteers – they didn't like to mix them because of possible friction, I assume.

Yes, that's a very important phase in Canadian history – the “zombies” and the riots in the army camps – that was another problem – I wasn't involved in that, but I was involved in this – so, here we were – they told us we would go to Oakville and while we know you don't want to work for the CNR or CPR moguls, nonetheless there's some merits from your point of view and you're getting closer to home; we'll make sure all the people who work in Oakville are people who live in Toronto, and they'll get every night off, they can get transport to their homes, they'd have every weekend off – so you're not really in the army, you see, you're half-way out of the army – so it was made quite attractive. So we shouldn't be working in industry and making profits for the bosses, but it's useful to us, too, you see, it's a saw-off you see. Very clever – stupid, but clever nonetheless – they pandered to prejudices and the particular interests of this or that group.

Well I didn't care about being close to Toronto – I had no wife or young family like most workers did – I was against being used as cheap labor – you see, we were working at army rates of pay – we were going to get I think it was \$3 a day then – that was the main factor, and we were scabbing – we were taking the place of workers who normally would be unionized under the Railway Workers unions. The first unions in Canada were the railway workers – very strong unions – the semi-skilled road gangs – they were unionized. So what they did was send us into unionized jobs, with army rates of pay, with other little blandishments – you'll get off every night and weekend.

So, I happened to retain a certain contact with the CCF over the years. So I thought I had the responsibility to rouse the labor movement to this threat to labor conditions. There were still workers unemployed you see – and the reason why they couldn't get work was some of those jobs didn't pay any wages – they were unorganized or if they were organized – they still weren't paying any wages compared to other shops.

So, I learned from a friend of mine that the High Park CCF was holding their Annual Picnic in High Park, so I thought well, I will go over and see Archer and some of the other unionists and tell them what's happening. This was not published in the press, you see – none of this information on what they were doing. So I went over, and (*CCF-MP leader*) Coldwell was the guest speaker at the picnic. I introduced myself and (*asked*) him did he know what was happening? He said he didn't know – so I told him – this was a serious move against the union movement, that they could conscript troops to substitute themselves for unionized workers – well, that's a real blow against the union movement – where is it going to go? What's the future of it, you see. So, he was astonished that they would do this –

this thing slipped through the top hierarchy. So he told me “I'm very glad I met you, I'm glad to hear what you told me, and I assure I will surely protest it.” I had tried to get press (*coverage*) for this. I knew there would be a revulsion among the Canadian people – that Canadian troops would be used for cheap labor.

So at any rate, I tried to convince the fellows we shouldn't do it. When I left Niagara-on-the-Lake I tried to tell them we shouldn't have anything to do with it – I tried to preach protest among the fellows – but they were sucked into it because they would be home and there would be weeknights, etc., – so I failed at the first stage. And I failed when we came to the camp. I made contact with the *Star* reporters – they said well, its a good story but nobody will publish it – the editors will cut it up. I said well, its a hell of a situation, isn't it. So what I did was, I used Coldwell's letter – Coldwell sent a letter affirming the conversation he had with me, (*and saying that*) at the first session of (*parliament*) he (*attended*), he would raise it as a protest in the House of Commons. I took that letter down to the press. The press published this – it was legitimized you see – Coldwell speaking in the name of the CCF and A.R. Mosher, head of the Railway Workers Union, an important union in the early days of the Canadian trade union movement – I took it down to the press and they said they would publish it, and they did publish it.

So next time when I told the fellows we shouldn't be doing it, and they saw it in the press, they agreed. Before we went out on the tracks – we lined up every day, you know, the platoon was called to order and the officers took over from the non-commissioned officers, I told the fellows, “we've got to stop it right now. We shouldn't be a party to it – I'm not going to be a party to it.” So the officer came over to me and attacked me. He told the fellows in the ranks “we have a disgruntled officer in our group here,” and he's going to handle me – of course this was an upsetting experience for me (...) At any rate, I decided I would move out right then and there. I stepped out of the ranks and told the ranks and the Officer that I was not a disgruntled officer. I was a Canadian worker and I'm opposed to what's happening here. They dismissed it, and we started to go out onto the tracks, and scattered up the right-of-way. So I told the fellows something is going to happen, and I want you to stick by me – we're okay, we can handle it – but you've got to stick by me – I no sooner got into place on the track than a sargeant came over – with a captain – he told me “you're going to have to go up the track, a couple of hundred yards further up than the rest of the men.” I said “oh no, I'm not going to be separated from the men, no.”

“We'll we will lay a charge against you. “ I said “You do what you want to.” So he did, they laid charges against me, so they called another junior officer to stand by me and said “march this man back into camp – we're laying charges against him for disobeying an officer.” So I started to move back with this junior officer as an escort. So I told the fellows “Okay, now's the time, we've got to act,” and they all fell in behind me – and we took the whole thing off – closed the job down. And I'm marched in with, about 150 anyway, fellows behind me. And we're “CB”ed – we're Confined to Barracks. And then –I'm trying to get the sequence now. This happened elsewhere – I knew a lot of fellows in the army, and I went down – I knew that something was going to happen shortly, and what I'm going to do – I knew there would be repercussions over what I'm going to do. I went down to the railway station and tried to contact people I knew and tell them – we can't let this happen – we cannot be used as cheap labor and so, I said “we've got to do something – refuse to participate in this.”

At any rate, the next day, after the news came out that after we closed down – with Coldwell's letter – we closed down the job in Oakville – it was called “the job” – that's what it was – (*laughs*) – this happened right across Ontario. The next day there were reports in the press that aircraft men who had been sent to work in packinghouses and foundries and other places – army fellows – they refused to do



it.

So this set fire, to the Ontario area anyway. How big it (*got*) – it never got (*significant*) press – the press was nervous about publicizing it. At any rate, they stopped it – they came and told us – they CB'd us – confined us to barracks – then they said, we're sending you back to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

When we got (*there*) they said “There was a report in the press of an emergency cabinet meeting – an emergency government cabinet meeting – I don't have the date and I don't have a copy of it, but it was reported in the press – the King government called an emergency meeting and at this cabinet meeting they decided henceforth this will cease; there will no longer be persons assigned to this, they will not be forced to do it – it will be voluntary, if it's done at all, and it will be at army rates of pay. So I guess that was when the thing burst – the dam broke.

**Volunteer soldiers and Québécois “Zombies” in the Army** (*the anglophone slur against Quebec draftees –Ed.*)

But within a day or so it telescoped. But, actually we carried it off. We were sent back ultimately to Niagara-on-the-Lake and they said “What are we going to do with you?” Well, somebody had a bright idea to set up a rehabilitation school – I protested this – I said “We're not challenging the rights of workers who have been in the army for a considerable period and who have seen action and probably have been wounded, etc., to get out of the army first – we're not demanding seniority rights – we want to be out of the army, period. If you have no use for us in the army, then you should demobilize.” They wouldn't do that – (*drop*) the seniority ritual – what they did was, set up a school.

And they offered me a position of partially administering a school in Niagara-on-the-Lake – of guys who had been in the army; they were going to teach them radio, typing and stenography, and shorthand, various things they could think of in their minds you know that would keep us busy.

So, I said no, I'm not interested in that at all – I want to be out of the army, I have a right to be out of the army, you have no use for me (...) So they gave me an educational discharge (*as*) I had applied for earlier, because I was eligible to go to university. Part of the rehabilitation scenes were coming into play, you see. So I said “I am eligible to get an educational discharge (and) I want (it) – I don't want to be involved in this phoney “school” – I want to be out of the army, and I want an educational discharge. They gave it to me like that (!) That was my life in the army (*laughs*) – quick!

*WR: The troops who went over to Europe voted very heavily for the CCF – what about the ones who never left Canada?*

Yes, let me tell you – there's all kinds of gaps, you know. I'm thinking what I told you (*miscellaneous inaudible comments...*) I was acquainted with a fellow who was in the Workers Party who I met later, and he told me and he told me, he had been involved in the uprising in Vernon. What the government did, was they set up a training camp in Vernon, B.C. and it apparently was all “zombies” – non-volunteers – the whole thing was. So they started to move in on them, to press them to volunteer. They continued to press fellows who were “zombies” to change their view, and of course there are ways of doing it – giving them breaks, you know, etc. The government decided that they would change the regulations, and persons who were not subject to overseas service, henceforth *will be!* They changed the rules – so all these guys who were “zombies” were now subject to overseas service. (*voice emphasis*)

First you see, the “zombie” was limited to serving in Newfoundland, or Prince Rupert – those places – that's where they used them – they sent the so-called “zombies” – Canadian workers who were not gone active, they sent them to Tiska. I read reports – I never met anybody who was one of them – but I

heard reports that the Canadian troops which were sent to Tiska, which is part of the Aleutian Islands, were put on board by bayonet-point – they refused to go, and they threatened them physically – they had to or they would be killed. Now I think that's true – I have no reason to question it, because they did send non-active people into Tiska. They decided that there was no such category as “non-active” – that everybody was “active” and subject to being sent to the European theatre. They didn't change it to send them to the Japanese theatre; they were subject to service in Europe.

When they did that, I was in the Horse Palace (*at the Exhibition grounds in Toronto*) when I was called up again after having resigned my commission, and suddenly a flood of troops started to come into Eastern Canada – they started to clear them out of camps – that's when the Vernon episode took place. There was a group of fellows who were not volunteers that were suddenly told that “you're subject to service in Europe.” They seized the camp. This was reported in the press. And I met a chap – I still see him occasionally and I should have a real discussion with him about it – but he played a role in this. They seized the camp – these troops who were suddenly told that you're subject to overseas service – and we're sending you over. They seized the camp. I know this fellow but I never had a chance to really talk to him about it. He was an activist in the Workers Party – (*there was*) a scattering of radicals, you know, everywhere.

*WR: were there —?*

Let me just finish this episode. As the conscripts were moved forward towards the European theatre, right across Canada, I was in the Horse Palace being re-inducted into the army. I talked to fellows, you know. Every time the train stopped, at any community, on its way towards the East Coast, hundreds of workers left the train – soldiers, troops – they left the trains, they deserted – it was really mass desertions. Again, I have no statistics – probably there are statistics – we should apply for them under the (*Freedom of*) Information Act – I'm sure there must be statistics on how many troops deserted, but there were thousands of them, and I met people who told me about it, you see, because I talked to fellows I knew in the army, in the Horse Palace, and they tell me that everybody left the train, and deserted.

As a matter of fact when I was going through as an officer in Three Rivers, which was the officers' training camp, I got a feeling of the degree of desertion in the Canadian army. This was before they changed the rules of the game – it was colossal – they were worried – I was stationed in Three Rivers – of course I had to go through Montreal. Whenever the train, with troops as passengers on the trains, were just traveling, going home to their wives or something, on leave, whenever these trains came into Quebec, people disappeared from the trains – they never went back to their companies – they went into the bush – there must have been thousands of them, because the military police started to be very demanding. I used to go to Toronto, home, on leave from Trois-Rivières, which was a military camp, and go back again, and the police harassed us, tremendously, because it was obvious they were losing all kinds of troops into the Quebec area, because of course the Québécois were sympathetic to anybody who would leave the army – they were opposed to the whole war – to which the Canadian workers are much indebted – to that anti-war sentiment.

But that's another thing I knew – when I went down on the train, half (*of the passengers*) would disappear. When I went to the Horse Palace, fellows told me every time the train stopped it was dangerous for them to stop the trains because the army forces melted away – so many of them deserted the army! (*laughs*) A very important experience – it should be documented and should be told. It's inspiring, the resistance of the Canadian workers being instruments of imperialism, against their interests.

## Canadian opposition to World War 2

*WR: What about the volunteers – the kind of people who followed you (on the track work gang – were they part of) the big rise in the CCF?*

I'm sure these people were becoming politically interested, because the war awakened people you know – it affected them – you had rationing, you had privileges, privileged positions for the petty-bourgeoisie, with rationing you know – this was a class society you know and class rights were recognized in the army and everywhere else, so anybody who was a sensitive person couldn't help but be alienated by the whole experience of that period, and become radicalized – where would it go? They went to the NDP, (*then*) the CCF – because the CCF was known and was harassed itself for having been opposed to the war, even though the party changed its position under Coldwell, who dissociated himself from (*the early party leader*) Woodsworth.

Woodsworth made a declaration when the war was declared – he said it was a personal declaration – that he could not support the war; that he was a committed pacifist, and therefore he was not going to vote (*for the war*). But he turned the leadership over to Coldwell. Coldwell supported the war, you see. This caused a crisis in the CCF – I was in touch with the youth group at that time, and they were opposed to the war – but I don't have any substance to add to it. I knew Irene Tallman because she was the Ontario organizer – the Toronto organizer at the time, and I was working in the CCF Youth when they expelled me. She helped expel me, along with Betty (?) So I knew her, and I knew she was a bit of a left-winger of some type, but I didn't know that she ever declared that – there is no doubt that there were elements in the CCF youth movement who were opposed to the war, aside from any influence I might have had on them – there were doubts (*among the antiwar CCF youth*) because they reflected the youth's aspirations for a better world – and many of them were recruited by the *Regina Manifesto*, which is very clearly an anti-war manifesto (*See the text at W15a-1933 – Ed.*)

*WR: We were just talking about some of the early opposition to the war – you mentioned Frank Watson* I don't know if we should take this off the tape after – we should think about it – he's still around – No, its fine, he doesn't mind – he's a man of considerable principle and courage – we were trying to get a response from the working class of Toronto and everywhere we were, to oppose the war. There were all kinds of incidents where guys were drinking in the beer parlour and they said “to hell with the war, to hell with the King government” you know, “I'm not going to spill my guts for those bastards” etc. – these things were said widespreadly on all levels of Canadian society – and workers were arrested – some of them were reported in the press, so you came to know them, if you didn't hear them yourself. At any rate, we thought our responsibility was to attempt to mobilize opposition to the war, even though the war was *a fact*, and troops were being conscripted and everything (*voice emphasis*) .

There was a comrade in our movement whose name was Frank Watson, and the leadership of the movement at that time thought it was possible to set a signal – I didn't agree with this, I never did – it was impossible to inspire anybody to do anything at that time, except a known revolutionary, an already committed revolutionary – and we (*were*) going to behead ourselves in vain. But they convinced this comrade that we should hold a public meeting on the corner of Brunswick and College against the war.

So this very fine comrade – a courageous person – he got up and held a public meeting – I only heard about it later, I was (living) in York Township – I think I would have opposed it if I had heard about it earlier – anyway we read in the paper that Frank Watson was arrested. He was the first person arrested under the Canada Defence Regulations – such regulations were not even available at the time for the defence! He was sentenced to six months in jail. He was arrested, his family beheaded, with two young

sons and a wife. But some of the comrades didn't want to get involved, which astonished me. I said, well, we got him into jail, didn't we? We made some propaganda – its questionable it had much merit, but we were responsible for him. I was one of the few people who went down to visit him, take him books, etc.,

He was sentenced to jail, and we weren't even able to carry on a proper defence because the regulations under which he was charged were not published. They've got to be published – somewhere – we carried the defence fund – we set up a defence fund. Murray, my brother, was the only known officer to my knowledge on the Defence Fund, and it got modest support – but generally I would consider it was a debacle because of course we couldn't defend him effectively. I pressed to get money to bail him out, to pay a fine. Yes, this was the debate. Should we pay the fine? Well, I said, why shouldn't we pay the fine? What's wrong – fines are not acceptance of guilt, of criminality, you know – you're caught by the authorities who are in power – so if we can ameliorate the conditions which they can impose, regardless of our will, I'm in favor of ameliorating them – what is a few dollars – it was something like \$300 – which was not a large sum, you know, even then it wasn't a large sum – so I and some other persons went around and we bailed him out. But he was the first victim of the Canada Defence Regulations, which were not yet published. That's Frank Watson, he was a Trotskyist, a member of the Toronto Workers Party of Canada.

*WR: Were Trotskyists arrested at a time when...?*

No – I'm sure the police were not too aware of our functioning and existence – not too aware of it.

*WR: Were there any civil libertarian lawyers who came out in the context of the Second World War, people who could defend?*

I can't recall any – not that I'm aware of.

*WR: Were there any pacifists against the war?*

The pacifists switched, along with Woodsworth – see, the war took on a progressive character in the minds of a lot of people. It was against Hitler. And they couldn't resolve this contradiction. In Canada, it was a war of inter-imperialist rivalry war – a war between German imperialism and British imperialism, with the United States coming in. So the workers have no interest in this war. However, the enemy is Hitler, which is an established fascist regime, and he's also got support among the French bourgeoisie, you know. The French bourgeoisie broke up when the (*German*) army came in and some of them went over – set up (by) Pétain – called the Vichy government. Then you had the underground in France, and of course the underground carried out a sabotage – Trotsky talked about this in *The Case of Leon Trotsky* which was a new problem for him you know, and I remember reading where Trotsky told John Dewey\* (...break in tape) (\**The US liberal philosopher Dewey played an active role in defending Trotsky and others against Stalin's purges in the 1930s* –Ed.)

## **Radicalizing the Army through books**

*WR: Ross, over the break you were telling me how you circulated books when you were in the army.*

Yes, sometime I took my own books, and sometimes I found books readily accessible. For instance I used to go over to the States quite often and bring literature back for the movement. I had battle-dress you know with big pantaloons, you know, they gave us, puttees – so I bought a good set of puttees, really nice and dressy, that fitted well, and I would go across and meet the Buffalo comrades – we established a real relationship with the SWP in Buffalo. There were some new young comrades. Vince Grey (or) Vince Copeland, I don't know if you know him – the American comrades colonized Buffalo – they didn't get anywhere just by some fluke – they sent some people into Buffalo, and there was a very

talented comrade who went in there – a petty-bourgeois type, he'd been an actor, but he wrote excellent columns – he didn't know anything about the working class – he had an emotional feeling for the working class – he wrote some of the best columns I've ever read – at any rate, I got to know some of these comrades really well, and I used to go over quite often in order to get books back, because the Customs would bar our books – Trotsky was on their prohibited list – he was barred.

*WR: That was during the war?*

Yes, during the war – we couldn't get any literature through. So I used to go over every once in a while, and of course in uniform I had easy entry into the country, and out of the country, because they assumed, particularly if you're an officer, that you're legit, you see – its a badge – they know what they're doing. I went over and I used to fill my pantaloons with pamphlets – I'd come back with 10 or 12 copies of *Socialism on Trial* by Cannon, which is a very fine pamphlet, which (*my 1980 pamphlet Dowson vs. the RCMP* is partly based on, you know, the style, etc. But that was one of the big entrees of revolutionary literature that appeared when the movement was in essence banned, declared illegal, by the government, on all fronts, where it had any possibilities of intervening.

But there was another experience that I had when I was in Niagara-on-the-Lake – I went down to the library one day – you know you have time in the army, you don't want to go home, you're tired of being in transit all the time, I used to go down to the library. I happened to, by chance, come across a veritable library of Marxist books, in the Niagara-on-the-Lake library, the public library. Some guy – donor or administrator – was a socialist, a Marxist – he had subscribed to, or had some kind of arrangement with, Kirk Publishers, who were the first publishers of Marxist literature in America – and he had *The right to be lazy* (the Marxist classic “*Le droit à la paresse*” in the original – Ed.) – Kautsky wrote a very fine book on *Reform or Revolution*, I forget the title (*also the title of Rosa Luxembourg's major political work of 1899* – Ed.) – I used to get them out too, it saved me getting them from my place, and of course it was more acceptable because they had the library stamp on them – they're a public institution. So I started to get guys to go down – I was stationed in Niagara-On-the-Lake for some little while – maybe six or eight months, you know. So I had the library really circulating in the camp, among the guys – with some difficulty, and of course they were always to some degree workers open to reading a book.

*WR: was reading a bigger factor in how people would radicalize than they would today?*

Oh, I think so – there were not so many distractions – you know, (today) you have to fight off events that are being organized, that are distractions for anybody who is serious – all kinds – like, you'd get me to go down to hear somebody at Harbourfront, which is possibly interesting, but its a substitute for something else, you know. Its of interest and some merit – but we never had those types of things before. The capitalist class I don't (*doubt have*) learned these things, and know how to divert the workers, but I think we have to concede, with the mass media, with TV – like this TV set – you know I could spend a considerable time watching TV which would be useful – like I was telling you Basil Davidson's series on the African Revolution – it wasn't called that, a series on “the change of pace in Africa” – its a radical program – it takes place – its repeated over days again and again – I don't want to record it, because I'd end up with a big bloody library of tapes, and I'd have no place to show them – they're low level, but they're very effective

*WR: talking to people who are active in unions, or radical movement in the 30s and 40s – they're always associated with reading, or reading clubs –*

Oh yes, its reading – there's no TVs – there's no movies that you could go to that are really oriented to the working class – not then – they were rare – a working-class movie was a rarity. That's why those movie houses like the Royce Avenue Theatre which brought in Soviet films (*from Russia*) oriented to

foreign-language workers had a certain attraction.

*WR: when was that? Can you tell me about that?*

This was in the 30s. Royce Avenue was a movie theatre – no longer there – I saw “Ten Days that Shook the World” there – obviously the guy who ran the theatre was a radical, and he built a clientele, limited but enough to make it worthwhile politically. I guess he was a sophisticated person, and they used to show these movies. I saw several Soviet films, several German films which were quite radical. Now, these things were quite common. But now there are radical films – with nuances of radicalism – not works of radical propaganda – but there is a lot of them – you can see some merit in them. Do you go to the movies very often? I'm attracted to movies because they are such a powerful medium, and there are more and more directors directing themselves to satisfy this cultural demand – for instance who buys NOW (*the Toronto weekly magazine*) and who reads the articles that you and (comrades) Ellie and Alice write – well, there are people who go to the theatre – there's a cultural atmosphere now, which is legitimized radical culture.

*WR: Does it make a difference when people of your generation radicalized more by reading books than the way you conducted yourself...? (inaudible)*

Yes, I think there's a tendency to consult one another – there's a culture which is promoted by certain levels of the population which is concentrated. There's a broadcast of radical culture now, through the mass media, through the ordinary so-called legitimate areas of ideas – pleasure, mixed up – I think there's quite a difference now. To study – now I'm moving into an area which I don't know (...I'm not) someone who is a serious educator who's thought about the problems of cultural exchange of ideas – but I would say there is less demand for ideas which is of a social character – for instance, we used to get people to go to meetings – there was no competition for radical meetings, which were an event which were attractive to a considerable population, and people would go and see *your* type of people there – now, there's a whole series of outlets – a whole series of challenges. I mean every night I could do something in the city of Toronto which is attractive and interesting, and in harmony with my orientation and ideology – doesn't bind me to anything, but is interesting and is an attraction – I think this is something new (while) before you had to read books (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: people were reading books more than today*

Yes, they would go to a radical meeting because it was an event. Radical meetings are not an event, now – they're not important – there's many of them – some of them are very low level, but I don't think that's been a factor in the dissipation of audiences – I would call them diversions – (*but really*) they're not diversions – there's more cultural opportunities today. I think the intellectual level and the level of interest – the number of persons who are involved in what they would consider the realm of ideas (*to be*) much higher.

*WR: The way you could radicalize persons in the 30s and 40s is to give them a book to read – that's not going to (work) today.*

No – I told them – did you see so-and-so, why don't you go and see that so-and-so. Of course I am probably not a good example because I've lived in radical circles – I've had an audience come along with me on a higher plane. But I would think that the movement would have to take this into account. If we were trying to build an effective mass movement, I would think that we would have to have a broader approach to cultural aspects of the socialist program.

*WR: Have you got any new books, or with people who would spend the night reading a book?*

And – I've had discussions with the guys, you know. Oh yes – well, what alternatives would you have? You're in the army, so what do you do? You either go whoreing, or drinking beer – and that's what a lot

of guys did in the army – its a peculiar life you know – divorced from ordinary society – the army's a self-sustained society – its beer, and women – those two things – and you're concerned about your family who you are deprived of, you see. Well, people wanted to read – I wouldn't say the reading public is larger – it probably is because of the vast availability of good literature, you know – how many people have read good literature today? The book-reading public is very large, and even for esoteric, radical literature – a very high (level) of (reading) public.

I look at some of the books of Verso – You know, I'm amazed that they come out – I don't know how many they sell – very specialized books, very revolutionary books, on different aspects of revolutionary theory – I'm amazed on how they manage to publish them – so the audience is broader – much more broad, and more sophisticated, more demanding in ideas. You know people don't just come to the movement on social grounds – you know the early movement was built to a large degree on social connections – family connections – its not an accident that the radicals' milieu was so marked by certain families – like, all the Dowson family was in the radical movement – every one of them – you couldn't survive in our family without coming around the movement to some degree – including my Mother who was really opposed to the movement from stem to stern. She came over to the movement ultimately, influenced by her children.

The movement was more *closed*, and more profound in its depth, in its connections – but it was limited – limited by that fact, that it was confined to that... I knew that I could take books out of the library down at Niagara-on-the-Lake, and I can convince guys to read them – was it because they were isolated from ordinary life – the army tried to get them diversions – it showed movies, arranged parties for the fellows – but I guess it didn't answer their needs (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: What happened to your little book club?*

Well, I moved on to another camp – you are not with people very long – you are in training camps, so people are in transit. Like, you go to the basic training – these fellows have just come into the army, being inducted. I think they are “30 day wonders” as they called them – in 30 days, you've got enough to go and kill a person, you see, enough to maybe save your own life, too – the army says: “you're okay to be shipped overseas to the battle.” Now we don't know if you're going to get any more training, it depends whether the front opens or not – some people went over to England and never saw action for years – a stalemated situation. More people got killed in the bombing raids by German airplanes than got killed at Dukirk or Dieppe, you know – when the war started to open up.

### **Resigning his commission to be among the ranks**

You know the Labour Party had a lot of influence in the British army – I've never read a book or studied this – those “parliaments” I mentioned in passing – the army opened up the door for those – the officers were supposed to be educators of their men – the army had some idea that the officers had some social responsibility – probably some do-gooders tried to prettify the whole sad and sorry experience by saying “we're going to educate people who are uneducated.” You know, the cross-section of the people's literacy was very low – so they opened the opportunity to learn a little bit of basic English – basic language, to encourage people to become leaders – they were looking for leaders for the war, of course, on a low level. They encouraged this, and I made use of it. Of course, people like me, when they went in, they opened up the possibility of discussing the Second Front – they did this occasionally you know – they stopped it in the camp I was in after a while because they couldn't hold them – couldn't dominate them, because the officers were incompetent – they were not good political propagandists for the cause of the Allied Powers, and they had people like me who were more effective than they – so they stopped them – they controlled them.

*WR: Can you give an example of a "parliament" you went to?*

I never went to a "parliament" – (I was in) a platoon – For instance, they had a syllabus – just like a school you know – and you had to do so much of this and that – so they had what they called "current affairs" opportunities, so they put out a journal – they published a journal (which) talked about – I can't (*recall*) what the themes were, they were innocuous – they left the door open, innocuous themes, but they gave opportunities to talk what you wanted to talk about – I could – a person of some ability could direct them to some degree. I just needed an opportunity to talk and I would talk about certain problems – as long as I didn't take on the officers openly – of course, they were embarrassed often because they didn't know their ass from their elbow – they were petty-bourgeois young people who were on the make – who became officers because of their class position, not because they had any abilities, particularly. It's even worse than the factories – you know – why does a guy become a foreman in a factory – you can think of any reason – because he's a suck-hole – maybe he's a slave to the boss, you know – but is it because he knows anything? That's the least important thing, you know

*WR: Were you more among the privates than the officers?*

Oh yes, the workers knew – the division was clear. Like I was telling you earlier, anybody who was a university student – just a student – he automatically became an officer, he went into the officers' corps – officers training; he had a batman – you know, officers had a batman, someone to look after their kit, who would do little favors for them. 810 was a big camp – I was in 810 camp in Borden, a very big camp, with nine companies or ten companies – a company would be three platoons – there you are, a considerable number of men. And they (*the officers*) had all kinds of privileges, they had their own barracks of course – they didn't live with the men. They had officers' quarters – the NCOs lived with the men – they woke everybody up, made sure they got down to the parade with their kit and everything, make sure they cut their hair – they were the "mothers" you know – if you wanted to be mothered, you'd be looked after – you wouldn't do anything unless they told you. There were all kinds of workers who were completely alienated in the army, and didn't care about being a good soldier – they tried to convince them that only good soldiers will survive – this is necessary to survive, to learn how to handle your gun – that is, of course, true – you've got to kill him before he kills you – all these things.

But the Officers' group is a real caste – like, when everything was rationed, in plentiful Ontario, the army wasn't on rations, or its rations were so good that you wouldn't be aware of being rationed. And we had "canteen money" which we paid into, because we had a good income, you know. I had so much money while I was in the army – more money than I ever had – I forget what the rate was, but the private was \$3 a day – the officer was at least – I hesitate to name the figure because I can't recall, but it was at least 3 or 4 times higher, and they had funds at their disposal for all kinds of purposes, and they lived a good life, The officers lived a good life – It was a real caste system there. I am sure some people studied it. I'm sure it exists today in the permanent force.

For instance when they finally conceded that they would let me resign my commission, they whipped me out of the camp, the 810 – and sent me down to Stanley Barracks. I was the "Officer of the Day" – in other words, the officer who formally, from the point of view of authority, is the chief officer of the whole camp. I was responsible for everything in that camp – Mister Big. Of course I was also in transit – they had permanent force people who were there – but they had to go through the routine of recognizing me as the Chief Officer. I raised and lowered the flag – I mean I supervised it – it would be amusing if they ever took some photographs – you would see me there, raising and lowering the flag – giving the orders you know – I mean, it's easy to adjust to the demands of it – snob demands you know – I was a young person, presentable-looking, ordinary figure – I looked good in a uniform you know – I



was sort of a model for some persons – I knew how to act – I knew what they wanted, so I gave them what they wanted, it didn't mean anything to me. A masquerade – necessary if you wanted to remain an officer, if you wanted to go anywhere.

## **Repression and revolt in the Canadian Army**

Well, the army is a caricature of (*society*) – I'm sure there has been sociological studies of the army – the permanent force army is another version of it – the centre of counter-revolutionary action, you know. The officer caste are very reactionary with the most rotten types of top officers – ignoramuses. The head of Bay 10 had been a traffic cop in Belleville – he was an ignoramus and a bull-horn – a man who didn't know his ass from his elbow but who had a loud voice and he was cocky and arrogant, and he knew he was an officer, like some guy who is a foreman in a shop, although a foreman has to be more sensitive (...) His authority is backed up by the upper levels right up to – I'm trying to remember the name of the committee that I finally had to appeal to, which takes all grievances – a very hierarchical institution the army is, including the Canadian army, of course. I'm sure there have been studies made of it. I think we should move on – I don't have anything more to contribute on this ... I

Oh, there's one thing I will never forget. You know, homosexuality was not just invented lately, it's been legitimized of course, by the independence and gutsiness of certain Gays who carry this fight you see – but when I was in the army, there was, every once and a while, some homosexual events (which) took place – the army moved in on them. I never experienced such a humiliating incident as when they paraded two guys who were caught in a homosexual act in the can in Camp Borden and they laid charges against them and they described it all out to the humiliation of not only those guys but everybody who was on the parade ground – they brought out the entire company and they read the order charge against these two – they said so and so did willfully put into his mouth the penis of (such and such) – a lot of crap, you know – they did this a couple of times when I was there – scared the shit out of everybody – humiliated everybody, you know – disgusting (...) “the flesh is weak” you know.

I witnessed the persecution of all kinds of guys who were inept, or ill, who they tried to make out were malingerers, persons who were “swinging the lead” you know, and they made those persons eventually break down, they couldn't accept that this person was physically unable to do it, hasn't got the character to do it, and they would expose them to everybody else; make the person feel like a pariah. And I guess (*some of them*) might have committed suicide – I'm sure – I don't know, because of course they could get away on the weekends and eventually brought into the army where I was – I was on the transit line, basic training to advanced training – but I am sure some persons committed suicide, who couldn't stand the crap, you know – it's a rough school, the army is. I guess they thought well, we might as well lose them here, as lose them over there, where some people depend on them – army is a shocking experience for people. I didn't mind it because I wanted to know about it (*laughs*) I figured this is where I am – and I always had the idea that we're going to change all that, of course.

The Russian Revolution, the experiences of the French revolts among the troops – I was acquainted with – I tried to prepare myself for what's possible – I tried to learn all the uses of the various weapons – I was really very interested in the weapons. What's wrong with this guy? I'm sure they must have wondered, he wants to know all about this – I really didn't give a damn but I knew it was necessary to know that, if I am going to play a useful role in the new stages of the struggle, so for some ways it was a challenging experience for me – in some ways, I enjoyed it – I found it stimulating. I was the best guy with a Bren gun, the best guy with a 6-pounder, the best – you know, they flattered you – they thought I was being a real patriot I guess – I don't know what they thought – I never asked them, (*laughs*) but they were taken with me – I resigned – oh, they couldn't just take that, and they tried ways (*to prevent*

*it*) – I'd become disillusioned with class distinction in the army – I told them that – the rotten with class privileges in the army – they knew that and when I said that as a justification for my resigning my commission – you see I didn't flout their laws or their rules and relations – I resigned, I didn't have them charge me – what they did was they used to throw out guys – often dissidents in the officer corps (*who*) had become drunks or gamblers – life was such – like, I used to go around with a guy who was a Hamilton worker who was a top poker player, but his father was a steelworker, and he was a radical – and he used to play poker all night – he made all kinds of money – I'm sure they must have read him out ultimately – so (*it was*) a microcosm of society, the army...

### **Discharge, a campus sojourn and finally back to the movement**

*WR: okay – you got discharged on educational grounds -- you started to take training but gave it up – were there other demands on you in terms of political activities?*

Yes, I went to University of Toronto, of course. I thought I could do that (*get discharged*) and help put out the (*movement's new*) paper. I really wanted to get back and play a role in the political movement – I thought I had some ability to write for the paper – we were short of people anyway – anybody was going to make a useful contribution, and I knew that I could (*do that*). So I started to work on the paper, and write articles, and I was having difficulty keeping up the minimum class (*attendance at U. of T.*) – you have to write the tests you know – you can't just drift indefinitely – sooner or later I was going to be bounced or given the suggestion well you know – and I just used up the credits – I stopped going to classes and I exhausted the credits. So I lived for about a year and a half on the credits, which were substantial because they were to promote me to fit back into bourgeois society you know

*WR: do you have any reminiscences of the other people at the school – most people who work on higher education said they (the ex-soldiers) were extremely enthusiastic students –*

I don't know about 'enthusiastic' but they were out to take advantage of whatever opportunity was given to them, and of course it was presented to anybody who was bourgeois-minded as a real opportunity – here I'm going to move into another level of society, on the upward make, I'm wined and dined, you know, I was given special privileges – I didn't need these people, though – I wasn't interested in doing political work on the campus. At that time, there was nothing happening on campus as far as I knew – the radicalization was later than this – I would think these people were the most conservative elements, on campus, the persons who got educational discharge – I don't know who they would be, as a general category – I would think they were persons who had senior matric (*high school graduation –ed.*), therefore who were not working-class, you know – I was surprised when I started looking at the figures – I thought that a revolution took place in the possibilities of working class to come to the campus – I thought that during the youth radicalization – it's not so – there were some studies made – I read them with amazement – the campuses didn't open to any influx of working-class elements of substance, not basically. They remained basically bourgeois – petty-bourgeois and bourgeois – well, when I was there, I didn't pay any attention to them. There was nothing happening on the campus as far as I was concerned, and the persons I would have associated (*with*) in the army – they were the worst types – they were types that I wasn't interested in.

*WR: You began working full-time for the movement?*

Oh yes...

*WR: What kind of things was the Trotskyist movement involved in '45 -'46?*

I would have to look at the paper to remind myself. But, general propaganda – we supported the CCF from the word “Go” – this was astonishing when the change of interest of activists in our party opposed the CCF and NDP orientation – its astonishing (*a reference to the LSA political upheaval and splits in*

1974 – Ed.) – I never visualized such a possibility – we'd been so long oriented, and effectively working in the CCF and NDP area, that it seemed to me this was an inevitable line of march for us – like for instance, I think you mentioned earlier, perhaps in a personal conversation, that the troops in Europe voted CCF – obviously they did, in big numbers. We wrote that up, we published that – that had a big effect on our orientation, because who was in the army? The youth of Canada – a massive cross-section of youth, ripped out of their ordinary channels of life and experience, and open to new ideas – open to the most radical ideas. I don't have the figures at my fingertips, but if I looked (*it*) up in the paper, we published those things – they were remarkable, the vote for the NDP (CCF), as against the ordinary youth and ordinary civilians, the CCF swept the electorate, and particularly of course in the West.

Oh yes, we were convinced that Canada was going to undergo a tremendous radicalization after the war. We visualized the revolution was going to establish important bases, in Europe, to say the least – we didn't know about Canada, and the lack of revolutionary tradition. You know, there's not what you would really call a revolutionary tradition in Canada. It's lost in time – like you've heard of the Winnipeg General Strike, but it was a localized struggle recently which didn't have a big impact on the industrial East, in the labor movement, in the working-class movement – I don't want to minimize it's repercussions or those who were inspired by it, but it didn't have any real effect. The radicalization of the CIO had a big effect, and it went political – the CCF encompassed it.

So, nothing untoward took place; for instance, the barricades (*that*) were set up in Windsor – well, they were spontaneous, they came out of the experience of the workers you know – the workers were receptive to radical solutions – they were faced with the destruction of their strike – so they had to take some drastic moves, and they found the ingenuity and skill and daring to do that – in an unforeseeable situation. This convinced me of the dynamic possibilities of the revolution, and the dynamic possibilities...

## REFERENCES

Mintz, Arnie: *A sketch of Ross Dowson*, 1988, Ch.1, 1934-36, Ch.2, 1936-39, Ch.3, 1939-45: text, photos and maps. SEE JPG files at W14-1988-10Oct12-1a-40 and RTF text file 10Oct27.rtf

## PHOTOS (at W18)

- 1939            "WAR OR PEACE" – Workers -- You are being betrayed into war!  
                  (SWL journal outlawed during whole duration of War)
- 1940-1        Paddy Stanton speaks against the war-time no-strike pledge at CLC
- c.1940-2      Future union militant Hugh Dowson on home leave in 1940
- 1942-1        Ross Dowson at Camp Borden, joining his class in compulsory arms (bottom right) near  
                  Barrie ON (from Mintz)
- 1945-4\*      Mass Autoworkers strike wins at Ford with auto blockade  
                  (\*Photos from All for one--OPSEU, 1985 – ref: Wayne Roberts)
- 1945-5\*      Union political action at Stelco, Hamilton -- transforming the farmer-based  
                  CCF into an urban labor-based party

## Part 4 The Trotskyist movement moves out at the War's end

WR: *did we recruit at all in this period?*

Did we recruit? Oh yes, we were able through the publication of that paper (Labor Challenge 1945-53) – although we didn't have any resources in order to launch tours and ventures of various types to propagandize ourselves – through that paper we made national connections. For instance, I made this a point – whenever I saw a letter to the editor in the CCF press – whenever I saw it, I sent (*the writer*) a copy of the paper. Sometimes it was of interest – we made up for a lack of connections by **establishing** them, on new grounds, with the paper – the paper was instrumental – it was called (...) *Labor Challenge* for a period, (*later*) it had a couple of names (“*Workers Vanguard*” late 1955 to mid-1970 reverting back to *Labor Challenge* in 1970 --Ed.) (*voice emphasis*).

Those papers became established national papers, and we cultivated (*them*) very carefully, (*all those*) connections, even though we had very limited resources – we did it on a big scale. And of course we ran for Mayor (*of Toronto*) you know – we ran public campaigns which were in many ways beyond the possibilities for us to really consolidate – imagine a handful of people in the city of Toronto, running for Mayor a person who is an ex-army officer, who has no roots in the labor movement – we had to hammer down the doors of the Labour Council to seek endorsement, and won support on the Labour Council – you know we almost got endorsement one year for our mayoralty campaign – because we were doing what the NDP – CCF I should say – should have done and didn't dare to do – like, when Ford Brand was (*city*) controller, when Stewart Smith was leading the polls, we did the job of carrying a broad, popular class campaign – so we had opportunities you would say were not relevant to our size, and our scope and our lack of integration in the class.

Those campaigns were very fruitful – we had quite an impact – for instance I was always inspired that I was able to popularize the most complex socialist ideas thanks to our “transitional program” – the program that was developed by Bolshevism, by Trotsky – the program that stems from the immediate needs of the workers, and raises these feelings and requirements to a level of class struggle and class struggle and class consciousness – we did very well with this – we carried the most effective campaigns – the most exhilarating experience for me – for I had not had a big experience as you can see – but we moved out, boldly (*for Dowson's Mayoralty program and speeches, see W14 – 1948 – Ed.*)

WR: *You ran once when you did really well – didn't you get almost the top of the opposition, anyway?*

Well, the *Star* had an editorial, commenting on what a terrible situation – shocking! – I can't (*remember*) the exact words – something to the effect “it's a shocking situation to think that in the city of Toronto which prides itself for its conservatism, its propriety, its sobriety, that a man – that's what they said – who wants a bloody revolution, got one in five votes that were cast!” (*See photo at W18-1948-1 Dowson for Labor Mayor (Toronto) RWP campaign – Ed.*)

WR: *In 1947 was it?*

I'm not sure – I'd have to look it up again, I used to remember these things (*See the 1948 photo at W18 – Ed.*) But we got one in five, and we didn't have the endorsement of the labor movement – we appealed (*for*) it – I think we got the endorsement of the Massey-Harris (*major farm machinery plant*) local because of a unique situation you know – but not the labor movement as such. But we had credibility, for instance every once and a while I'd get a comment, a little while ago – what was it? Somebody wrote me – a leader, Murray Tate, a leader of the Typographical Workers Union in the *Star* or something – he wrote me a very friendly letter – I forget what the occasion was – but I hadn't heard from him for years, you know – but we disturbed the conservatism of the trade union bureaucracy with

those campaigns. Because we did what the mass movement *should* have done – that was the spirit of our movement you know – we had been anticipating a revolutionary upsurge coming out of World War Two, but we didn't wait, we tried to intervene – and we knew that the working class in Canada were fated to (*become*) radical – the time, the place, the issues, were not assured – but we intervened boldly – and I think serious revolutionaries need to do this (*emphasis in speech*).

We exerted ourselves to meet the challenge which confronted the class, and which really confronted the CCF – and as a mass movement, it confronted them – and when they didn't respond, we did. And we got the support of considerable numbers of CCFers – while they didn't agree with us – I didn't have any illusions that they voted for Trotskyism – but while Trotskyism didn't appear as an ideology or as a program, it appeared as a movement which was a working-class movement which was doing what the working class had to do – I'm sure that a lot of workers in Toronto who voted for us, voted for us not because they were Trotskyists, although they respected us, they knew we were doing what the whole movement should have done.

### **The R.W.L. campaign for Mayor of Toronto**

*WR: Can you tell me about this (radio) program you were on during the campaign?*

(Laughs) I'm not prepared for this question – that's so far back. At any rate we carried on an effective campaign. Not like some of the later campaigns which were sort of a side-show, like Jacquie Henderson's campaign – I was embarrassed when the LSA ran her and some other comrades – and the nature of the campaign they carried (*see Labor Challenge 1972*) – it reflected the primitiveness and the euphoria, the naivete of the new radicalization at that time.

I ran as a labor representative – a socialist – as a worker. I related the program, the campaign, on that basis, and we were accepted on that basis. I went to every meeting – sometimes the press – I remember one campaign when (*someone said*) “What's happening Ross – I don't see your name in the paper at all – aren't you putting a campaign on?” We created a serious threat, because when I went to election meetings, I developed a certain skill in popularizing the revolutionary program – the transitional demands of the program.

We always said what we were. Maybe we were a little ultra-left – we called ourselves Trotskyists, you know – (*it was*) in the headlines of the paper sometimes – not exactly a (*tactic*) which would win friends and influence people – but that's what we were as an ideology, as a current in the Left, we didn't hide it – sometimes we pressed it forward, but really it was on the program, and we developed a series of transitional demands – all popular demands – and we presented them as a coherent whole. We tried to build the labor party – one of the key planks in our program was not “you've got to join the RWL or whatever we called ourselves at that given time (*the “Revolutionary Workers Party*), and you've all got to subscribe to this paper – no, we talked about how we've got to build a mass labor party – we raised the level, you see, of the whole.

So the results I think were quite inspiring. I was as inspired as the *Star* was shocked. That one in five of people in Toronto – despite our smallness and our inadequacies – because I was not really an experienced person, I had to develop it, and get it, get used to, and it takes some years to get that, you know – I was a new person in the radicalization – I came out of school, the unemployed movement and out of the army – I had no big trade union experience – but we did what the mass movement did (*should have done, as RD says earlier –Ed.*) – as a matter of fact, it was so effective that Stewart Smith took us on (*Smith being a leading Communist Party – Stalinist – civic figure then – Ed.*) – I took on the bourgeoisie, the Tories – they had the administration of City of Toronto. Stewart Smith was Board of

Control member, you know, who over the years pulled quite an impressive vote – but he became a spokesman for the administration, against me. When I went to the meetings, I wasn't interested in taking on Stewart Smith – denouncing him or disassociating myself from him – as a matter of fact he was an effective reformist, he wasn't the issue at all – either in theory, or in life – in impact and influence, but he took me on at every meeting. It got ludicrous you know – I'm sure people didn't understand it – what's Stewart doing, taking on this man who seems to be a nice guy, you know, who's got some ideas which may be a little eccentric. But he was disoriented by his anti-Trotskyism, he had to take on the Trotskyists – I'm sure they were very embarrassed by the successes we had – they were limited of course, they were electoral polls, not relevant (*although*) of some substance because we said what we were and what we wanted to do and I think we said it very effectively.

Murray (*Dowson, my older brother*) started that – Murray was the person who first ran a candidate for Mayor, and I carried it on. We got some good votes – but they were the votes that the CCF-NDP and the labor movement had for sure, and were delivered to us because there was no other way of delivering it – nobody else was appealing for it. I think we had an impact in forcing the CCF to move out in the realm of municipal politics, although (*they are*) still reluctant partisans, you know. They were reluctant, you know – they had to be dragged into it, embarrassed into it.

### **Other radicals and early Trotskyists in wartime**

Earlier than ourselves, another group of Trotskyists – the Field Group, the LRWP that I mentioned earlier – this was a dissident group that broke from the Canadian mainstream of the Spector forces, set up its own operation – dynamic young radicals; they really went like a house on fire, you'd think the revolution was on the order of the day, it was tomorrow – they committed themselves with great dedication – with all their resources – they went down and held street-corner meetings every week

*WR: In the 1940s?*

Just before the war, before 1940 – when I came in, I was torn by which group I would join. I heard about these people and they impressed me because they were dynamic, and they spoke in terms of social revolution. They were weak on the “transitional program,” they were petty-bourgeois and they didn't know how to talk to workers – but they were dynamic and effective people, and they were very attractive to me. Spector had already left for the States, and MacDonald was getting old, and tired – Stalinism was a terrible experience for him because he was a mass worker, and now he's having to fight for his existence as a human being – you see, you were slandered and vilified – you have no idea of what the Stalin period, which Gorbachev is saying we have to get rid of – what terrible impact it had on the Left – it factionalized it, it embittered it, you know – everybody, the person on your Left was your **worst** enemy – you had to destroy the theory of social-fascism – which Penner talks about (*see the Penner books: The Canadian Left, 1977, and Canadian Communism, 1988 –Ed.*), which seems to be obsessively – what they said (*in*) the theory of social-fascism was that those who were closest to us, are our **main enemy**! The persons we have to destroy! (*emphasis in speech*).

That's what Stalin did – so they formed a bloc with the Fascists in Germany – (*do*) you know that, for a period the German Communist Party, the mass CP, the apple of everybody's eye, formed alliances with dissident elements in the Fascist movement – temporary, conjunctural – in Saxony, in several places – Stalinism brought this thing into the labor movement – it never existed before. Before that – I'm not saying all was sweetness and light, you know, but there was a mutual respect, for one type of revolutionary for another – a feeling of class identity – that was destroyed by Stalinism – smashed! To call me a Fascist – drives me crazy, you know (*laughs*). That pipsqueak, the organizer of the Ontario CP, last year, called me that, “an agent of the RCMP” – is mind-blowing. How can a movement be built

that has no feeling of solidarity...

WR: (*inaudible question, on Jack MacDonald*)

MacDonald was destroyed as a mass leader – he was a popular figure – he was respected, you know, by people who disagreed with him completely, but he was respected – that was a mutual relationship. I didn't know Jack MacDonald, but he was a mass figure, it was obvious to me – he reminded me of James P. Cannon (*the American veteran revolutionist, founding member of the SWP and author of several historical books – See W20 – Ed.*)

When he spoke, that breadth of feeling, of working-class culture, of sophistication, like he could (*cite*) Burns you know; he was part of the cultured working class, a pattern-maker; he was part of that, who came from overseas, and brought that culture with him, and that was the level that was established by the most sophisticated people, until Stalinism came along with its Moscow Trials and frameups and vilification – call who you want a Fascist, a thief, a spy – all this – you justify murdering them in Spain, you know.

It was justified, you know – the destruction of the CNT and the Five (*the anarchist movement in Barcelona – see Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" – Ed.*) and the POUM in Spain was not unknown – it was published in the press – everybody knew it was taking place – they hid it, but Stalinism didn't hide it – it defamed them, slandered them, vilified them, and justified it.

The first person I ever read who was (had) a popular appeal, who put forward his views, (and) defended them, was (George) Orwell (*Animal Farm, 1984, etc. – Ed.*) But then, in Spain, it must have caused a crisis in the CP in the radicalization, because the POUM was a mass party – which was said to be a “fifth column” (*traitors, agents*) of Hitler. This is something new – Stalinism was something new in the radical movement – as you will see when you hear more and more of the revelations, when the feelings – like this woman who has now said what happened to her in a column in the *Globe and Mail* the other day – its unbelievable – she was a young communist in Canada, in Toronto, went back to Russia and got caught up in the “Doctors' Trial.” We didn't get the details, but the persons who were sentenced to 20 years in a concentration camp along with her – a very high number of them were doctors – so I assume it was part of the famous frame-up by Stalin, of the doctors who were alleged to have poisoned revolutionaries at the behest of Hitler, you see.

### **Recruiting union leaders in the early days of the RWP**

WR: *There's a book called One union in wood – (by) right-wingers?\*) ...Some indication that Trotskyists (were active in the IWA?) – (question inaudible) (\*by J. Lembcke & W.M. Tattam, 1984)*

R.D.: It couldn't help but deal with Bradley and Whalen (*see also the fuller pictorial account with numerous references to both B.C. unionists, active in the RWP for a short period: The IWA in Canada, Neufeld & Parnaby, 2000 – Ed.*)

WR: (*Further question, inaudible, on the militant faction in the Woodworkers' union in BC*?)

Yes, they were the leaders of it – oh no, they were in the CCF, you know, I don't doubt Bradley was in the CCF – and probably Whalen was too – Whalen deteriorated – I don't know what his origin and background was or what the problem was, but eventually he got (*another*) job – his evolution was quite a disappointment – he became a standard trade union bureaucrat – but that was not true of Bradley, who was a worker-militant, a very fine solid type, and Muriel, Whalen's wife, was a very good type – and there were other rank and file militants I met when I was out there, who were working with them, and

we eventually had to break off relations with Bradley because he was a – became a right-wing opportunist in that type of fight, you know, but that was not a right-wing deviation – they would say it was because (they) took them on – they were the administration and a very bureaucratic administration too – and they lost to the caucus that Whelan and Bradley built – but it wasn't a right-wing development.

You know, trade union struggles are not Simon-pure – they reflect the backwardness and confused and uneven development of various unions. Some right-wingers were in that caucus, but it was broader than they, and it settled accounts with the Stalinists. It wasn't committed as an anti-Stalinist faction, but it took on the bureaucracy, and the Stalinists were the bureaucracy in this situation, and they were a pretty brutal bureaucracy – pretty crude, and viciously anti-Trotskyist – so it was an opposition, a diverse opposition – I'm trying to think of the names of the other leaders – one of them became a leader in the BC labor movement over and above the Woodworkers – I can't recall their names, but they had a record – they were union militants of status in their own right. But Whalen and Bradley were a key element in that caucus – a caucus broader than they... (*See Dowson correspondence with the B.C. branch and IWA unionists in W14 1946 (Sept), 1947-BC-Jan-Dec., 1948 Jan-Nov., BC Mar-Dec.; 1949 Jan.-Nov.*)

*(end of session –Ed.)*

#### *PHOTOS at W18*

- c. 1948-2      Leading activists at RWP headquarters, (*back row*), 3rd from left: Myer Shapiro, Ed Aldis, Murray Dowson (*at right door frame*), Hugh Dowson; Sonia Rosenthal (*centre in front of Murray*), Paddy Stanton, *unknown*, Vern Olson (*Centre row*): Jeannette Dowson (*white blouse*), Sadie Jourard, (two unknown on right) (*Front row, sitting, l-r*) Gordon Garbig, Ross Dowson, Joe Rosenthal, Bill Brown
- 1948-3      Ross Dowson (31) leader of the RWP Toronto (1945 to dissolution 1953)



## Part 5 The proletarian base of the early movement

WR: *(What about) the Quebec woodworkers – Jean-Marie Bédard?*

Jean-Marie was not in the Woodworkers *(at this time)*. What was *(the status of)* Jean-Marie Bédard? At any rate, he came to Trotskyism. He came on a theoretical plane to the Trotskyist ideology – as a revolutionary. Jean-Marie Bédard was not just a union militant – he was a revolutionary – in some ways, *a romantic* – had romantic concepts – you know, he was inspired by the French Revolution – he must have read all the books on the French Revolution, like I did – Marat, you know, the great hero. But Jean also brought with him – he comes as a nationalist – comes out of the French-Canadian Québécois nationalism.

### Recruiting Jean-Marie Bédard in Quebec

Jean-Marie was a Quebec nationalist when I first met him – as a matter of fact, I learned quite a bit from him about the Quebec nationalist movement, which I think the Marxist movement had to learn. I think this has been a big weakness in Marxist theory, on the national question. I came to this conclusion when I started to see this nationalist sentiment develop in Canada – but in Quebec it was a big experience for us.

WR: *(Was this) back in the 1940s?*

Yes, Quebec – for instance traditionally, the *(so-called --Ed)* “Leninist” concept of nationalism was *(that it is)* bourgeois, and reactionary – *(that was)* automatic, that nationalism was social-patriotic – just another word for social-patriotic – but that nationalism wasn't social-patriotic at all – it was anti-social-patriotic – it was reflecting the needs and aspirations of the Québécois workers as against the federal state, so it didn't identify with the nation – the nation it did identify with was an oppressed nation – in some forms, maybe not like the colonial masses *(which)* are degraded in their living standards, but *(like those that)* have developed national grievances – language, living-standards, wage rates – such grievances. *(See W7 –Quebec Series, esp. 1945- “Problem of French Canada” – Ed.)*

At any rate, Jean-Marie Bédard came to us, because we started to understand Quebec – he was a person who came out of the nationalist movement, and a very *(able)* speaker – I've not heard an orator equal to Jean-Marie Bédard, except perhaps Maurice Spector, who was known as a great orator, even in the Communist International. Bédard was a great speaker – in French (laughs) How did he speak?

WR: *Emotionally?*

Oh yes, evocatively – he was a mass orator, like you don't hear any more – it's terrible to hear present Left spokespersons – they mumble, and – like I went to that meeting the other night you know and was told what so-and-so said – I won't mention his name now – I didn't even hear him half the time because he had his hand in front of his mouth while he was talking – it's interesting – I don't know if you've heard some of these people, but they're ill-trained; they're used to speaking to a class – they're used to speaking with a microphone, they're used to having absolute silence. They don't like a heckler – I come from a totally different scene – I like to heckle speakers, and I like *(to be)* heckled when I'm speaking – I got this from speaking at street-corners – that's another thing the early Trotskyist movement did – they spoke on street-corners – we spoke at Allan Gardens *(in the 1960s -Ed.)* – we were part of the right to free speech in Allan Gardens along with Milton Acorn and others – we participated in that because we wanted to talk to workers, we wanted to get an audience. To get an

audience, because we had no money to go on the radio or TV, so we used to hold these street-corner meetings.

**A note on J-M Bédard as head of the Quebec CCL (*in Quebec, the predecessor to the present-day CLC –Ed.*)**

*WR: (Getting back on topic) – you were talking about Jean-Marie Bédard and the different styles of oratory*

I got to know Jean-Marie Bédard because he came to us. I'm not sure exactly the stage of his evolution – I probably do know, but I'd have to think about it – he was a trade union militant, a journalist, yes, for (*the Quebec City daily*) *Le Soleil* – he was a cultured man who wrote well, and spoke well, and was very personable, and he came to us on the plane of ideas – we had nothing to offer but ideas – we had no machinery, we had no forces in Quebec of any character at all – but he came and he brought with him his prestige – people knew him and respected him. He identified himself with us completely, later. I'm trying to think – he was “knighted” you might say, by the trade union brass, to be head of the Quebec CCL – the early one, the Canadian Congress of Labour. He became the head of it. Now why, I'm not sure, I'd have to think about it. At this time, why, this person, who (...)

**Jean-Marie Bédard solidarizes with the RWL**

(*He*) came to us – because of what? Of the promise we had – not what we were – we were a very small group, you know – none of us were real leaders – established leaders in any way – but he was a person who was coming forward, as a spokesperson for the Québécois nation – as a nationalist, as an established personality, as the head of the (*Quebec*) CCL-CIO, the combined operation – he was appointed to that, but he had no real experience, except persons recognized him as, persons of authority recognized his character, his possibilities – probably they had no alternatives – probably the Québécois working class had not thrown up many persons who had promise and who had dynamic possibilities – but Jean-Marie Bédard had that.

And he came to us – so, as I told you he was a great speaker – a feeling for a basic class line – as a matter of fact, I know (*that*) because I wrote some of his speeches – I went down – as soon as he came to us – we knew this was a challenge for us – whether we could hold on to a person like this – the pressures were great, you know, for him to not pay any attention to that little group, that little Trotskyist sect, you know, (*that*) has all these aspirations but basically illusions, (*those*) were the attacks on us – that this group has no promise. I knew we had promise, but (*we had*) to prove to Bédard that something good (*was*) had to be for Bédard, something very substantial.

So he came to us, and I got to know what he said, because I helped write what he had to say – I had many talks with him – I went down to Montreal and stayed with him for a period – lived with him for a short while, off and on, and met the comrades there – he had established connections there, he had contacts – we recruited some of the leaders of the CCYM, the youth movement of the CCF in Quebec, yes, in Montreal.

*WR (An unclear question about language in the Quebec CCF)*

They were French-speaking but they were not francophones (*their mother tongue was not French – Ed.*) – they were English-speaking workers, but they knew French – they were patient enough to learn the language (*well enough*) to be effective. So they approached us, too – those persons came to us through our press – we circulated our press far and wide, and we made contact with them because of

our orientation to the mass movement, to the CCF – we recruited them (*a significant part of the, pre-LSA, leading SEL cadres, such as Jim and Pat Mitchell – later Pat Schulz – Gerry and Ruth Houle, Ken Sutherland, and Bruce Bruce and “Bunny”–Virginia–Batten –Ed.*)

With Bédard, I don't know what our first contact with him (*was*), but it became very (*important*) quickly, it rapidly escalated, and he became part of us, fully. So I got to know his speaking (*style*) and his capacities, because I wrote some of his speeches (laughs). I had developed a knowledge of union issues, and Marxism, and he developed rapidly because he was a great admirer of Trotsky – maybe independently of us – it was quite possible that he became a Trotskyist because of Trotsky's writings, because they were widely (*published*) and Trotsky was really an international figure – on a big scale, of the highest water, you know – and his books were published by bourgeois publishing houses aside from the efforts of the Trotskyist movement.

At any rate, I remember writing some of his speeches and I went and heard them – I would go to the meetings – but I couldn't follow the French-speaking intellectual very far, because my knowledge of French was inadequate, and my hearing is not good – and I found that was a problem, when I went to France – my hearing was a big drawback to becoming acquainted with the radical movement in France, or in Belgium, because my hearing is poor. And it couldn't be solved; I did everything I could to overcome this.

Bédard was a great speaker. But, he was not a discriminating ideologist – he was a person satisfied with generalities, he was romantic – I don't know if that's a useful way to describe him – I don't know if you've ever come across a revolutionary, a fine type, but he didn't have the equipment, the ideological equipment, but was effective, because he was a romantic, a person who identified himself, body and soul, with what he was saying. Jean-Marie Bédard did that.

*WR: He probably was quite a hit in Quebec*

Oh yes, he became a popular figure – I'm trying to think of one popular event he did – early in our relationship with him – there was an opportunist at the head of the Montreal Labor Council – if I heard the name I could tell you it's this person – but Jean-Marie Bédard led a struggle against him – (*this person*) wanted to break out of the CIO-CCL. Jean-Marie took him on, and defeated him – he was the biggest figure in the Montreal labor movement – a big, big figure – I'd have to look through the papers to find out who he was – but Jean-Marie Bédard was a bold trade-union operator – very bold – and a convincing. He soon exhausted that area.

He soon exhausted that area, because, to be a Bédard and to have the partisan views that Bédard had – you had to have a base under you to survive – he gets into a labor movement that's already factionally divided you know, and he comes (*in*) with a full-blown ideology. Well, you soon become isolated. (It was) another matter – a totally different problem – was to establish a base – and he didn't have the time to establish a base – he had, against those strengths (*due to*) some contradictions in the needs of the trade union machinery – that's how he had it – it was a fluke, but it was a fluke that we could take advantage of – had the responsibility to take advantage of, and try to build something under it.

Well, this was very very difficult – besides, Jean-Marie Bédard was an unstable person, a romantic as I tried to tell you – a romantic person, and he was unstable. He died recently, I suppose you know about it – it was rather pitiful, because he did eventually marry my sister (*Lois Bédard*) and they broke up – he drank heavily – this was a problem he had, I knew about that – it was a matter of great concern to my sister.

He was an effective organizer. He made connections in many small towns in Ontario and Quebec – probably many more in Quebec which I'm not familiar with – but his district took in parts of Ontario (*as Eastern district chief of the Woodworkers Union, the IWA – Ed.*) – he made all kinds of connections as he was a very personable man. But he was always known for his ideas, because he always spoke his views – he didn't hide them, and he was a **genuine** person. But he drank heavily – this led to the rupture of his marriage, and it also led to a certain estrangement with us – he was an unstable person, but a fine revolutionary. But we couldn't absorb this type of person. He got involved in some of the factional disputes in the (*Fourth*) International and in Canada – took positions which were uncompromising, and he became alienated to some leading elements in the movement – and we weren't able to assimilate him. He was never in Toronto – he never came to the centre which was in Toronto, so we weren't able to assimilate him in our small group. (*Speech emphasis*).

He was a big figure which came to a small pond. Very hard for a big figure to live in a small pond. And then of course he was flattered by the attentions that were given him by certain nationalist elements and by the CP – I've said he was a romanticist, and he was flattered by the attention the CP gave him – and they had (*political*) machinery of course – and eventually he fell into the (*Quebec Stalinist*) Communist Party periphery – as a matter of fact I think he eventually joined the CP – the CP treated him as a member, and I remember I had some arguments with him in the latter days – for instance, he even considered “Solidarnosc,” (*the 1980s Polish unionists' revolt against the Stalinist bureaucracy – Ed.*) which we supported as the opening wedge of the political revolution, which we (*also*) now see under way on a higher plane in the Soviet Union (*a reference to Premier Gorbachev's 'glasnost' anti-Stalinist campaign in 1988 just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union – Ed.*) – he considered them counter-revolutionary.

### **Dowson's introduction to Quebec *indépendantisme***

*WR: In 1940, was that your introduction to Quebec nationalism?*

To some considerable degree – you know, you can live in English Canada and not pay any attention to Quebec. And we had so many problems and so many possibilities that for a long time said “we'll come to that, we'll deal with it.” Eventually we did deal with it, and we wrote some basic documents. You see, for a long time the Canadian Trotskyist movement was hardly to be said to be “Canadian” – it was based on its international program, and it didn't develop an understanding of the unique, specific problems in Canada. It was only in the latter years, with the development of the LSA and its widening connections, that we started to come to grips with this – it was forced upon us, you know. (*See W2 “Canadian National Question” documentation commencing 1968: “Canada-US Relations” – Ed.*)

*WR: You are saying the movement was primarily internationally focused*

Yes, and that's what attracted Bédard to our movement – the international questions, you know, and that's where we were left – until we started to run in the elections, and started to develop a continuity of the movement, and the breadth required to put out a good paper, we didn't have a really developed Canadian understanding (*or program – Ed.*) (*Cliff Orchard, co-editor of this archive, relates that during his early days in the SEL in the late 1950s, hearing SWP historian George Novack lecturing on the history of American Trotskyism at a summer camp in New York, remarking that “To date, the Canadian movement has yet to write its own history.”*)

*RD: We had **one** (factor), the labor party – we understood that – that was our redeeming grace – we understood the labor party – we accepted the labor movement where it was, and we saw what we (saw) that was dynamic possibilities with it – that's one place where we were superior, and free from sectarianism, which is the big danger of a small group, even with a worked-out program – (*there was*)*

a big danger in (*not knowing*) how to apply that, and not fall into sectarian posturing, as you can see in the Trotskyist League and some of these other groups, (which) live on themselves (*speech emphasis*).

WR: *Do you remember much about Quebec in the late 40s?*

Well, Bédard brought in a few people around him, but we weren't able to hold onto them – they were persons who were moving up into the trade union movement, as the trade union movement in Quebec became francophone. I'm not able to tell you now – I'd have to think about it, I've never had occasion before – but the Quebec labor movement was never – it was (*composed of*) professional people, skilled people, the radicals were skilled, sophisticated elements – they were like the early Canadian labor movement before the rise of the CIO and the mass unionization of the mass industries. Quebec was slower than that, you know the “Quiet Revolution” (*of the late 1950s and early 1960s – Ed.*) was a real fact – the minimizing, the under-cutting of the influence of the Catholic Church took place very very rapidly – its a recent – revolution, in reality – you know a lot of people think the Quebec Church dominates Quebec – but of course it doesn't by any means at all – as a matter of fact the Church has become irrelevant – you know, (*women's*) the right to choose (*on abortion*) in Quebec (*where three juries found Henry Morgentaler innocent on Federal charges – See W3 -Women's Liberation --Ed.*) is a big movement – the Church doesn't dominate it. So the radicalization is a continuing factor in Quebec – it's late, but its a continuing factor. Bédard was part of a group of new young radicals that were coming out of the “Quiet Revolution” but who took revolutionary conclusions.

WR: *before the rise of working-class independentism?*

Yes, they're part of it – you can't say “did the revolution take place?” The workers didn't take power in Quebec – it was a revolution of an accumulation of experiences and knowledge – that's what it is – accumulated reforms you might say – a result of the totality of change of outlook and dynamics, you know – and of course the independentist movement was a big factor in that – you can't dismiss Lévesque, who played a big role – the mass figure, Lévesque – I've listened to some of his speeches – marvellous speeches, by Lévesque – he had a real feeling for the Québécois – their injustices, you know. A mass figure, Lévesque was – and it was part of the radicalization, but it went beyond that – he was outdated (*break in tape – likely a spoken reference to Lévesque's opposition to the militant factions in the PQ, i.e., his stubborn opposition to the spontaneous movement for French unilingualism around the battle for Law 101 to establish French as the language of the workplace, and legislating French-language schools for immigrants, which succeeded despite him –Ed.*)

(*Tape resumes, back on topic.*) OK, so in that period when I worked closely with Jean, I'm not sure how long it was, but I lived down there in Montreal for a period, you know, and he was pulling together the CCL, against right-wing trade unionists – so he played a very very important role.

WR: *you mean he was pulling together (new forces) against the old gang?*

Yes, the Quebec labor movement was quite corrupt, opportunistic, and some of the forces were being dissipated – I think it involved tramway workers – my recollection is very vague of that time – but a leading trade union bureaucrat tried to split off key unions, key locals of the Canadian Congress of Labour, and Jean-Marie Bédard played a very important role – I could reacquaint myself with this because we wrote it up at the time\* – of pulling these forces (*back*) together. So that was a significant contribution. That's why they hired him, you know, because he was an effective and militant activist, and he was a good unionist. (\*See W14 RD personal correspondence 1945-1951 – Ed.)

He came to the union movement through a job he had as a reporter for *Le Soleil* – that's how I first heard of him – he was a reporter. Very bilingual – multilingual – I don't know what more we want to say about him. How important is this – I'm not sure, for your efforts here, and if it had to be researched, it should be done in a serious-minded (*way*), because mine are only impressions – its quite a long time

ago, and I was involved in other matters at the time – that was ancillary to what I was doing.

Bédard was an unstable person all along, of course – our connections with him were not the best because he was a romantic and it was hard to have a serious, hardball talk with him, you know, and of course it reflected his origins as a Quebec nationalist, but I learned from him about that too, of course, because the Marxist movement paid no attention for a long time to the phenomenon of Quebec nationalism, which of course was radical – and he introduced us to this. But I met him at a time when he was playing a big role in the union movement and it was a very valuable experience – and what it became later – well, its a sordid story of a person who was a bit of an alcoholic, and at loose ends personally, had family troubles, all kinds of problems...

## **J-M Bédard opposed World War 2**

*WR: What do you remember about Jean-Marie Bédard, and who else?*

And Phil Valliancourt – a group of people who started to come to Trotskyism. They came to us because they saw our opposition to World War 2 – I meant to put that in the record – J-M Bédard was opposed to WW2, like the Québécois were, so was Valliancourt – these people were young radicals – I would say sort of petty-bourgeois but genuine francophones, Québécois – Jean-Marie comes from Lac St-Jean area – he's a genuine Québécois – his mother was Irish, she came to Quebec and integrated with the francophonie, and I first –

*WR: Can you tell me a bit about him – Valliancourt?*

Not too much – he came with Jean-Marie; he was a close school friend – I assume he was in the nationalist movement with Jean-Marie – as a matter of fact, he went on – while Bédard identified himself with the revolutionary currents and took revolutionary stands on many questions, Phillip Valliancourt never did that – he was the Québécois who became the head of the Quebec section of the CLC (*the cross-Canada Canadian Labor Congress*). He took over the post that Jean-Marie was first given and he became the administrator of the CLC in Quebec – so he was a competent person but he never identified himself with the revolutionary movement, like Jean-Marie did (...)

*WR: Meeting Bédard was a noted unionist. He would have to deal with the question of the Quebec workers and the nationalism of Quebec.*

Oh yes, Jean-Marie identified (...*broken malfunctioning recording...*) Jean was a part of the pan-Canadian movement, we recognized that the Quebec group – I think the Communist Party did, too, though (...) I would have to check this because we published a great deal of literature on this – it became a matter of great interest to us and to our membership – that literature was a big experience for us – we tried to “colonize”\* Quebec – we tried to make connections with the Québécois – I went down to Quebec and stayed there for a while – Murray, my brother, who spoke French – he went down and lived there -- he married a Québécoise during the war (*Murray edited and published the underground wartime Trotskyist paper in Montreal (See W12-Socialist Action. Only one issue of La Verité known, at National Archives – Ed.)*)

(*\*the ironic term used by the anglophone movement to send young comrades to Montreal to establish a francophone HQ in the mid-60s – See W7, W8, W9 --Ed.*)

## **The proletarian nature of the early Trotskyist movement**

*WR: (What about your older brother) Murray Dowson?*

We've been talking about Murray – I'm talking about Ross Dowson. I had always hoped to be able to play a role in the union movement, because the union movement in Canada is open to radicals,

particularly the CIO/CCL – quite open to radicals, and we were a proletarian group – we were not a petty-bourgeois group by any stretch of the imagination. I suppose it could be said that some Trotskyist groups, despite themselves, never developed a serious proletarian core – but the Canadian movement was always proletarian – first, because of Jack Macdonald – Jack Macdonald was one of the leading unionists in Canada – he was one of the founders of the Communist Party, he was a leading unionist. He had a coterie of people around him. We picked those persons up. *(Another person)* Jack? came towards us, the head of the boot and shoe-workers' union – he was a Trotskyist. I forget his name – Jock Marshall, that was his name – he was a Trotskyist – he worked with Jack Macdonald.

*WR: (inaudible) ... Did you know him? (referring to Jack MacDonald –Ed.)*

Not very much, because there was a generational problem you know, and I wasn't in the leadership of the movement in the earlier days – I was a member – furthermore, I was out in York Township. But you want to talk about unionism in the Trotskyist movement – well, for instance, I never knew anybody who wasn't a worker in the Trotskyist movement except a little coterie of people who were protégés of Ken Johnson and who made connections with Spector through independent activity of theirs – but the core in the Toronto Branch were unionists – they were in the needle trades – we had Harry – can't think of the name...

Joe Meslin was a unionist of course and became a union organizer with Federman – and Claremont. Joe Meslin was a person I met very early – he lived in an apartment where some leading activists in the Trotskyist movement lived, and he always considered himself a Trotskyist although he was never a member of the Trotskyist movement – I didn't think he was a member for a very long time – I may have to correct that, but he was never looked upon as an established member, but he was a unionist and he was very close to us – you'd have to say at least he was a sympathizer – he was a union activist. Harry Claremont was a leading activist in the Cloakmakers' union.

### **The role of older brother Murray Dowson**

As I said Murray Dowson took a job as an organizer for the operating engineers. But, I always visualized that I would become a unionist, an activist, but the comrades convinced me that I had the potentialities of editing the paper and carrying on activities like that – and I was directed very consciously by some leading comrades into moving into the movement and into the political party operation that we were building – and run the bookstore, and write for the paper, and speak for the movement – so I never developed that *(becoming a union activist – Ed.)* – that was my own concept of myself – I considered myself a proletarian, not a petty-bourgeois intellectual – and in the Canadian movement, there were no real petty-bourgeois elements, though they turned up and we didn't bar people because of their social origin, or even their tendencies which might be said to be petty-bourgeois – we tried to assimilate those people and make effective revolutionaries of them. But we recruited that type of person – we didn't bar them as I say.

*(Alas, the 1960's student-youth radicalization swept into the movement as a dominant force with its vitality and volatile exuberance, transforming the Trotskyist LSA – however proving vulnerable to ultra-left international and domestic diversion – Ed.)*

But basically we recruited workers – that was what the movement was composed of – for instance, Murray Dowson worked in DeHavilland – Murray was an experienced unionist – during the war he went down to Montreal and got a job – I think he was in the big Angus shop, where he met his wife – she was a Québécois proletarian, who taught him French – he became bilingual. But Murray came to Toronto – he got a job in DeHavilland in the latter part of the War I think where he met a whole group of radicals who we cultivated, and he became quite a factor in the union. I'm thinking of Frank

McKenna, Vic Hugh – and there's a couple of other fellows whose names escape me, but they were active unionists and they had a core operation in the DeHavilland local. And then Hugh, my other brother – he became an autoworker – at various times he worked in Avro, in DeHavilland, he worked in Ford and went to Windsor.

But we always had comrades who were union activists – dedicated unionists, who developed a real knowledge of the labor movement and played a role in their locals, and sometimes in their districts (*having gone*) to conventions. I remember that once there was an article in the *Star* – rather amusing – Hugh was a member of the union, and he was elected as a delegate to an NDP convention – but some persons knew he was my brother and so it became a scandal in the convention (when) they tried to bar him – he was supposed to be a “Trotskyist,” you see – but he was a unionist – a longstanding unionist – and was elected as a delegate to the convention – what would it be, yes, the Autoworkers. So the papers picked it up – that he was barred – and they made mockery of the arguments that (*they used*) to bar him – there's an old feudal concept that it's in the blood – in the bloodline, the inheritance, etc. – he was a Trotskyist not because he was one but because he was my brother, and therefore they justified excluding him, and they tried to expel him – a scandal which the *Star* made mockery of you know.

But we always had a union core, and you can see it by reading the paper – those were not phoney articles – I wrote articles about big union events even if we didn't have anybody in that specific situation – like I went down to Stelco when the big steel workers' strike took place after the War – at the very end of the War, and I wrote articles which were very authentic because I tried to find out all I could about it and tried to write the articles for workers who were looking for leadership – they were analytical articles about union policy – our policy versus the CP's policy and for instance the reformist policy of (*Steelworkers' leaders*) Charlie Millard and others – those articles are genuine analysis of the events as they were unfolding. I went to the Ford strike – at the time I think my brother Hugh was in Windsor, during the auto barricade (*1946*) – I wrote a major article on that – it was written with aid of autoworkers who were involved in the struggle – you know, you have a lot of workers who are unionists who don't develop a facility to write – I don't claim to be the best writer (*laughs*), but I developed a certain ability to do that, and we carried articles, if they were written by *me*, they reflected the views of a core of workers who we had contact with – they weren't just Ross Dowson's (*views*), and they weren't just written from newspaper clippings, they were written in consultation with union militants (*emphasis by the author.*)

### **The proletarian base of the movement in British Columbia**

For instance we recruited Ron Dosford – the brother of a Communist Party cadre group in the Autoworkers, the “boy Communist” Dosford – his brother came into the movement – I made contact with him in the army, and recruited him from the army. He was the brother of a leading CPer in Windsor – Dosford – I don't know what's happened to him now – that was many years ago. In B.C., our comrades were unionists – like Reg Bullock, who was a leading comrade in our movement, was a leader in the Boilermaker's union on the North Shore of Vancouver – a long-standing leader of that union – always delegates, all of these comrades up-front. There's another friend – a comrade of ours – who was part of a coterie of radicals and radicals and unionists around Malcolm Bruce – I'm trying to think of his name – a very able unionist, very respected... (*probably a reference to Bill Whitney, a veteran branch dissident in BC – see W12 1956, Feb. & March (Dobbs correspondence) and 1957, Sept. – Ed.*)

So you'd have a miss-impression if you thought the Trotskyist movement was, in some way through no fault of its own, like some other sections might have (*appeared*), was petit-bourgeois – composed of



pettit-bourgeois militants – no, it was basically proletarian, not just in orientation but *in fact*. And of course when you're oriented to a mass labor party, you can't say that's a petit-bourgeois orientation (*laughs*) – we always took as our touchstone, the CCF-NDP, which was a mass labor party formation – even the CCF was a mass labor-party formation – we were a little slow in recognizing that – I remember we approached it rather carefully – we had no experience – but before we identified with the CCF the Canadian Labour Congress had endorsed the CCF – I think about 1942 – I think it endorsed the CCF as the political arm of labor – this is very early – the major union body in Canada endorsed a political party, a reformist party – so we were a little slow in recognizing that reality (*speech emphasis*).

But that reality is a big factor in our politics. If you're oriented to a mass labor party, you're oriented to the union movement in Canada as we have been for many many years. And we developed connections at various times – even though we didn't really have a substantial base – we had no big spokesperson. Jean-Marie Bédard was a leader of the Québécois labor movement and subsequently of the Woodworkers which was a key union in Canada. But Reg Bullock (*in Vancouver*) and these other comrades were leading unionists.

*WR: (inaudible, a question on issues in the Canadian labor movement)*

Whatever was being debated, they were involved in, you know – I would have to scan the paper (*Labor Challenge or Workers Vanguard*) – the paper would reflect that – if you're going to write a history of the Canadian Trotskyist movement, you've got to examine the press, and I didn't have a chance to do any of this – and its a long time since I've thought in these terms. I have sort of a resistance to become “the old man” – the “I remember” man in the movement – I'm an activist, even today, you see, I don't have that concept of writing the history of the movement although I'm under a lot of pressure to do it and will probably end up doing it – but (*laughs*) I would do it with reluctance. (*Compare the rich historical accounts in James P. Cannon's writings, i.e., The First Ten Years of American Communism – see W20 Marxist booklist – Ed.*)

### **The RWP's connections in the post-war union movement**

*WR: In terms of the union movement, were there any major union figures that you embraced at this time?*

Well we won the dissidents in the IWA. One of the most important struggles in the Canadian labor movement was the struggle against the Stalinist corruption of the Woodworkers' Union – the famous union out on the West Coast. We built a caucus in that union and we brought to our side one of the founding members of the Woodworkers – his name is Tom Bradley – a historic figure in the BC left – and we also won another person who was a transitory figure – what was his name? What was his name now? Ridiculous. (*Tom Whalen\*– Ed.*)

At any rate, he led a struggle against the Stalinists – there was a crisis that confronted the Stalinists and all their crimes in the labor movement in BC came to a head, in a split. I was on my way out to BC when I came to Kamloops I picked up a newspaper in the stands and I read that the biggest local, Local 1217 of the Woodworkers, “Breaks from the Communist Party” – I forget the names of the CP'ers – but they had (*control of*) that union for a long time like they had in the UE (*the United Electrical Workers – Ed.*)

But that union (*the IWA*) remained a pivotal union in BC for an extended period – they lost it (*the faction around Bradley and Whalen lost control in spite of*) the good deeds and principled conduct of this relatively small faction we built in that union.\* We weren't able to hold it, because we didn't have an apparatus, we didn't have many forces – these comrades were capable comrades but they were a

head without a body, to a large degree – they reflected the pent-up grievances of those workers who wanted a union which was controlled democratically by Canadian members. (\*See the official history in Neufeld & Parnaby, The IWA in Canada, 2000, p. 89, p. 119, 135 – Ed.)

The question of Canadian unionism has been with Canada for a long time, you know. (In 1988), Bob White's (*contribution*) comes in when it comes to a head and (*when*) the fruit was there, ready to be picked (*referring the Bob White's leading the autoworkers out of the US autoworkers' "international" UAW into the independent Canadian Auto Workers – Ed.*) It took a long time in the history of Canadian unionism. (*In the post-war period*) it was reflected in the all-Canadian Congress of Labour, which was a Canadian national trade union centre – it's not a new idea – some people think that the idea of a Canadian union movement, organized and financed and determined democratically by the Canadian (workers) is some novel innovation, of “nationalism” (*whereas*) its the natural order of things – (*laughs*) I always thought it was the natural order. The proof of this was that the all-Canadian Congress was a mass movement, and it was the primary factor of stimulating the CIO – eventually it fused, you know, to form the CIO – I forget what it was called – but the two of them came together.

WR: *The Canadian Congress of Labour*

Yes, as the Canadian Congress of Labour – (*which became the CLC – the Canadian Labour Congress-CIO – Ed.*) Well, I have to brush up on those things (*names*). But that fusion took place. Canadian unions have been in existence for a long time – and not marginally – there was this powerful Canadian trade union centre which fused with the CIO – that launched the CIO on a new scale (*in Canada – Ed.*) Well, Mosher always had this concept – he was the leader of this union – A.R. Mosher -- and the nucleus was the Railway Workers (*the CBRT & GW – in which some LSA/LSO interventions were made in the early 1970s – see W15a-#5 – Ed.*) which were probably the most nationally-based union in Canada for many many generations – I suppose one of the few nationally-based unions.

WR: *It's often said that (this) was inspired by the Cold War, by the CCF's right-wing. It is your impression that this opposition to the Communist Party's leadership of the IWA was where it was rooted?*

It was rooted in the class aspirations and class experience of the Canadian working class – they were not just led by a gathering of opportunists – this (*concept*) would be ludicrous – this is to dismiss the Canadian workers as a working class with its own experiences, with its own aspirations – in harmony, in solidarity in many occasions, in complete unity, (*by*) dissolution into the American labor movement – but always behind that was the concept that we were going to build our own union movement – what kind of working class is it that has no consciousness of itself? I can't understand it.

You talk about 'narrow nationalism' – it wasn't 'social-patriotism' – these unions weren't permeated with social-patriotic (*sentiment*), which is the usual thing you would identify with (*bourgeois – Ed.*) nationalism – it's not the ordinary 'bread and butter' type of nationalism – it was the concept of self-consciousness, of self-identity, of independence, of democracy, the idea that we're going to run the show – we don't need anybody else – we'll seek aid and we're prepared to aid others – but we're going to build a self-administrating operation.

I don't understand these people who think that one section of the international working class, which elsewhere has its own identity, (*but*) in Canada its not going to have this identity – is that normal? That's what they suggest to me – that it's normal, that one national group of workers should be subservient and toadies – an appendage – of another nation, particularly the most powerful imperialist nation in the world. It's ludicrous, you know.

## The Jewish labor movement in Ontario

*WR: Is there a reason why you would be prone to being involved in the Jewish population?*

Well, the Jewish workers were the core of the movement for many many years – you have to appreciate that – they came with, in their packsack, the experiences of the European worker. Most of the Jewish workers were from Poland, which was the centre of radicalization on a world scale, you know– the Communist movement was a massive – democracy was a mass movement – and so the comrades came over here with this. I don't know, some of them didn't even learn English – they were in the Jewish labor movement. There was such a thing as the Jewish Labor movement in Ontario, in Toronto, for many many years. In Winnipeg, in all the major proletarian areas – there were Jewish wings – for instance, the Workmen's Circle was a powerful movement in Canada – I even joined it later on, as a Gentile – I joined the Workmen's Circle, which still exists. It was the centre of Jewish socialist thought until “Third Period” (*sectarian*) Stalinism, when the word went out to break from these organizations. I joined the Workmen's Circle when it was already in competition with the United Jewish People's Order (“*UJPO*”) which was a split-off from it, promoted by the Stalinists.

But the needle-trades (*unionists*) were the key radicals – they were the bulwark in the early days of the CIO. I remember the first experience I had in the movement with other comrades was going down to Oshawa, to the Oshawa strike – the CIO was organized at Oshawa by a very militant strike, and all these comrades went down to join the picket line and identify with it – and that's the first experience I had – I had never seen a strike – (*like the one*) at Oshawa, led by Charles Millard who was a worker on the job floor, and who played a key role – no matter what subsequently people say about him, he played a key role in the organization of the CIO. The needle-trade workers were a key part of that. They came in and fleshed out all the radical efforts – they were good for money, they were good for picket support – they were good for whatever could be good for the labor movement, you see. So you had to appreciate the pivotal and (*central*) role of the Jewish workers.

### *PHOTOS at W18*

1951 On the occasion of the marriage of Jean-Marie Bédard and Lois Dowson, with Ross and her mother Mary Dowson, in Toronto

1974- 2 Le camarade Jean-Marie Bédard, President International Woodworkers Regional Council in Quebec, addressing a membership local

## Part 6 The Trotskyist S.E.L. and the farmer-labor C.C.F.

(...) I don't know of any books by the New Left (*on this topic*) but these were epochal struggles – for instance, the acts of solidarity with the Hamilton Steelworkers were inspiring – I think the army even responded, the army groups. Probably you remember them – I have a poor memory, but I seem to recall that there were army concentrations and schools in Hamilton, and they came out behind the Steelworkers strike.

There was a situation in the Canadian labor movement that doesn't appear to have any connection with that – of course it's part of it, but it doesn't have any connection. It would seem that the working class at that time were revolutionary – (*although*) not now revolutionary, but that's false – the workers responded to the objective situation, and they responded in the American way, you know, without inhibitions, without reservations – with all kinds of innovation. We're going to have that again, of course, its going to be on a higher plane, though, because there are more persons who are familiar with revolutionary ideology – more persons with a rudimentary revolutionary ideology than ever – I would say even among the working class. I was just going to qualify that – which would have been a mistake.

I think that Marxism has established its legitimacy, its validity – it's widely conceded. Its in the universities now. Marxism was never in the universities (*previously – it was only*) esoteric to a few people, but (*today*) it's established in universities – who are the youth radicals in the universities today who came into contact with Marxism – the Danny Draches and all these people? They're the people on the campus – they're in advance of the students – the present generation of the students – but the present generation of students has no doubt assimilated some of their experiences and could probably relate to some of them.

I'm sure **you** did (*to Wayne, labor pamphleteer & author – Ed.*) You were on campus, you told me about the things you learned – you knew – I think we have a situation of a radical ideology being spread from the top levels of the educational institutions. Marxism is legitimized, I think – everybody has some acquaintance with Marxism – it's going to be more legitimized with the Gorbachev revelations (*on the crimes of Stalin – Ed.*) you know, with 'glasnost' spreading the truth about the heroic days of the revolutionary period – that's going to have a big effect. What is the effect going to be of the opening up of the archives? (*of the Russian Revolution – Ed.*) (*speech emphasis*)

*WR: Was Marxism legitimate in 1945-46-47?*

Not really – it wasn't on the plane of ideas – there were radicals and activists – but not on the plane of theory. I'm not really able to substantiate that – because, there was not a wide availability of revolutionary literature at that time – it wasn't widely available. But, you have now the establishment of all kinds of publications houses, like Lorimer, etc. – we didn't have that, then. Of course that movement reached back, and picked up some of the earlier movement, for instance earlier we were talking about the re-publication of Gustave Myer's book, which I came across (*via*) persons who had been in the old Socialist Party of Canada, and which became established in the early communist movement – but since then its been built up on, you know. It's much more accessible.

### The significance of the CCF in the radicalization of the 1940s

*WR: The movement in '45-'46 was very aggressive – there was a big radicalization coming on and you were hitting hard at the CCF being too reformist, and its leaders –*

But we supported it – we never erred in that – we knew the significance – the immediate and historic significance of the CCF – we knew that. We knew it had a cadre element in it, from the earlier socialist

movement. That's the merit of Penner's book – I tried to suggest that – that this was the foundation of the radicalization. That book (*by Penner*) is underneath his later book, which is much more limited in scope – a good book nonetheless because the big challenge then, (*and*) was for a whole epoch, which Penner was writing upon – (*it was on*) Stalinism – a big factor in the Left in Canada. And it turned in on itself and destroyed all kinds of people. The Communist Party suffered it – the union movement suffered it too you know.

Like, if you want to talk about the key role the CP played in the development of the CIO – and I don't challenge that, its true – its a historic truism – you have to say (*talk about*) the negative results of it though, because these people became Stalinized – whole generations were corrupted – a debacle! – we haven't come out of that yet – we need 'glasnost' – I tried to suggest that at the meeting, (*that*) the Communist parties have got to be true to all of what they think themselves to be, they've got to promote 'glasnost,' they've got to look back and re-establish the legitimacy of democratic debate in its ranks, to open itself up to innovative Marxism – a whole series of things have got to take place – and that's why I dealt with this because the CP has proven to be impervious – it's not learned anything from Gorbachev – not at all.

### **The formation of the SEL/SIC anticipates the 1960s**

*WR: OK, when you were organized around the 1950s -- 1951 – that change of name was to the “Socialist Education League” – in 1951 or so. What was behind the change of name? (In B.C. it was known as the “Socialist Information Centre” – both appeared actually later in 1955 – ed.)*

Well, I think we reconciled some of the problems – if I recall correctly, there were running problems with the comrades in BC. We didn't have a homogeneous experience – we were collaborators – we had a correct historical evaluation of the tasks before the Canadian socialist revolution, but we didn't have a common political experience. One of the problems was the CCF – one of the problems – and, I think that by that time, particularly with the formation of the New Democratic Party (*in 1961*), we were able to overcome these differences, so we fused our two groups, in Vancouver and Toronto, and we launched ourselves as the League for Socialist Action. And it wasn't just a paper affair – it led to a qualitative transformation of our forces – an integration, very small forces of course, but an integration.

*WR: Where would (that) have been – in Toronto and Vancouver – where else?*

That was basically where we were, and had been; we were in Prince Rupert and we had some good connections in Saskatoon, and Montreal of course – that was it pretty well, in recollection – it could be erroneous – basically correct.

*WR: Now I guess the youth radicalization was the big development in the 1960s – how did you come into contact with that?*

Well we were carrying an intensive program of 'educational' (*members' internal classes –Ed.*) and forums (*public forums with movement and guest speakers –Ed.*) We had set up a bookstore; we involved ourselves in elections in Toronto – I think I've said something about it on another tape – But, we carried on a series of popular electoral campaigns – you know at one time, at that time, elections were annual in Toronto – we ran in them all, some candidates, and sometimes got a good vote, and depending on what was happening in the overall political situation, our vote accelerated. For instance, at one time as I said, we got one out of five voters, (*who*) voted for a man who the *Star* said wants a 'bloody revolution' – that's what they said, that's how they red-baited us, you know.

At that time, what year was that – 1947? – well that's a big thing you know – Now, we took advantage

and we responded to the aspirations of the workers who were anticipating that the CCF would move in – for instance the CCF had Ford Brand as a controller and there was also Stewart Smith who got a broad labor vote too – he led the polls for (*City of Toronto*) Board of Control for some while – and of course we had Dennison who was an alderman – there was a whole group – pockets of CCFers – who had base – but this group had no initiative, never ran for Mayor. So we moved in, and took advantage of that opportunity and conducted what we considered were model campaigns – modeled, and addressed to the level and understanding of working class as a whole.

We did what the CCF should have done, so we got the vote that would have gone normally to the CCF. We got that vote because we addressed ourselves to it consciously – and those were big votes – was it 24,000 – I don't remember what the vote was – I remember that phrase from the Star – “one out of five voted for Dowson --”

*WR: In the 1960s, how did you meet the radicals – in the peace movement or on campus?*

Well as I say we did those popular activities – we got known – the Trotskyist movement got known through those popular activities, and particularly those election campaigns – but also then we also carried the bookstore and we carried the forums – we had the Forums every week for years, every week, on topical matters – and our headquarters were always in a very popular area for passers-by. And we put a paper out – we did big distributions of the paper – we put on big campaigns to increase the circulation of the paper (*'subscription-drives' – door-to-door sales in working-class neighbourhoods – Ed.*)

So we carried on a considerable, sustained activity for some number of years, and when the youth radicalization took place, we gave them our address. They came to our address. Young people were curious to know what was this about. What are these people doing? And we developed a very effective series of Forums – very well attended. Not only did we have our own leading comrades address the forums; but we were able to attract other people to the forums.

At that stage, I see – who was the Negro (*writer*) – Austin Clarke – he started to come around. He lived on Asquith, just across the road from the headquarters, on Cumberland and Yonge, and he started to come around. We invited these people to speak, to cultural type of Forums, too, broader types of Forums which reflected the interests of new developing radicals – We didn't address these forums entirely on theoretical concerns of the Trotskyist movement – but, we tried to show that the movement was a flexible movement – which had something to say on matters of current concerns no matter what their level was. So these Forums became effective, and very popular – tied to our election campaigns – and we developed a periphery. People wanted to speak at the Forums, and the bookstores were quite successful at this time.

So the radicalization started to find us. And we addressed ourselves to the issues of the radicalization. For instance, the women's movement started to develop. We didn't stand on our past positions and demand they come to us; we started to concern ourselves with the women's movement, and started to write on it; we started to meet the women who were moving into the radical milieu on the basis of their experiences – so I think we made a very genuine and deep contact – for instance, the Communist Party didn't support women's liberation – I'm sure they must have written about it, but they thought it was peripheral – it wasn't a big issue, of the nitty-gritty of the working-class struggle – I'm sure they were very formalistic and considered it as ancillary and maybe even as a diversion from their concentration in the union and the basic industrial workers – a sort of fetish about that.

The youth radicalization took place, and they were outside of that also; for instance the gay movement

was more recent than that, but they even barred some leading Communist Party youth who identified themselves as gay, and they were expelled from the CP. So the gay movement was a verboten area – not with us – we saw it as part of the radicalization, and we took stands on it and we attempted to recruit people who were gay, although it wasn't an area of concentration of effort, it was part of the radicalization – like the women's movement – we proved ourselves to be much more flexible, more tuned in, to what's happening in the Left.

### **The anti-nuclear arms, anti-Bomarc missile movement of the late 1950s**

*WR: do you remember the Youth for Nuclear Disarmament?*

I don't know that body itself –

*WR: Or that whole disarmament movement? (Roberts is referring here to the anti-nuclear arms movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s – Ed.)*

I think that that came before the Vietnam movement, didn't it? I think the antiwar movement came after the Vietnam War movement – that's my impression, very distinctly my impression – *(Ross is referring to the “Ban the Bomb,” anti-nuclear-bomb testing, period of the late 50's, as no notable anti-Korean war movement appeared during the McCarthy witch-hunt period of the early and mid-50s. The anti-Vietnam War movement emerged by the early 1960s on a world scale, with mass opposition and rallies in which the Trotskyist movement commonly participated prominently in united fronts, particularly in the U.S. and Canada – see W16a -English Canada, and 16b -Quebec, in our archives – Ed.)*

I could be wrong, but I don't think so – so I think that the Vietnam struggle – the struggle in Vietnam and the Revolution there, and the American intervention was a big issue with Canadian workers, and people of goodwill, you could call them. This came with Canada's complicity, and support for the American intervention. Canada was on the Commission, the UN commission or something that was set up over Vietnam – *(the ICC – the “International Control Commission, set up allegedly to oversee any Western powers' war crimes violations – in this period see Workers Vanguard, then Labor Challenge and Young Socialist, and La Lutte Ouvrière, then Libération and Jeune Garde – ed.)* As well the Canadian government played a rotten role – I think they set up the division of Vietnam, if I'm not mistaken – again, this is my terrible memory – I was involved in all this, I know it all, but I can't recollect it too well.

### **The bankruptcy of the Stalinist Communist Party in Canada**

(...) So for many years, persons became used to the idea that the Communist Party was a revolutionary cadre, and even though some of its positions are not revolutionary, it's a revolutionary core, and it calls itself that – but you know, as time went on, and as it revealed itself in the Fair Play for Cuba *(Committee, see below – Ed.)*, and as it revealed itself in the Gay movement, and revealed itself vis-a-vis the NDP, more and more people came to understand what the CP is, a conservative force, not a force for revolutionary initiatives, and a pressure force – for instance, I don't want to go into their record – we're not talking about the CP – but as you know the CP of Canada supported the *(World War Two)* No-Strike Pledge; the CP of Canada supported the Social Credit movement in its early days – they have quite a record – they supported the foundation of the Israeli State – I was thinking about it the other day. Here the Arabic movement is fighting for its life against the Zionist State – but the Zionist State was initiated by the Soviet bureaucrats, they launched it off, supported it – I remember looking out the window and watching the first celebration of the establishment of the Israeli State – the Communist Party was out there in full force, with banners and everything else – so, I think more and more people are understanding that while the CP has some revolutionary cadre who have gone to the

wrong address, nevertheless, its not a (*real*) revolutionary party.

And I would say, what is the revolutionary party? The ones who continued the early days of the CP? Well I always claimed that *we* were – I think it's substantially correct that the CP went off the track, and (*it was the original*) cadre of the CP, the Macdonalds and the Sectors (*who*) tried to carry it forward, and some of the heirs of Macdonald's and Sector's initial actions were the Trotskyists.

### **The radicalization of the Canadian union movement in the 1960s**

*WR: The new radicalization was largely coming out of the campus – was there also action in the trade union movement in the 1960s?*

Not much – less – as a matter of fact, *we* had to make the appeals to the union movement – there were elements of the union movement that identified with the anti-Vietnam war movement – I must say now we know about the CAW, the Canadian autoworkers, I must say that the founder of CAW identified with the anti-Vietnam war movement, (*alone*) of all the trade union brass (*speech emphasis*).

*WR: McDermott?*

Well, (*CLC leader*) McDermott did, too – White did, too – well, now, whether White did through the influence of McDermott – he identified himself with the anti-Vietnam war movement from the very word Go – he made himself available for the movement in its early stages when there was no great acclaim in the ranks of the organized labor movement – I have to say that about McDermott – the record (*should be*) made clear.

*WR: (inaudible) ...the unions are quite different in Canada than in the United States...*

Well of course they are part of the labor party formation, which they are not in the States. You know, that's a terrible weight of reaction on the labor movement in the States (*where*) there is no labor party, that they support the Democrats, and that the radical protests are always muffled or diverted by this lack of any radicalization in the labor movement, in the popular mass movement. In Canada, this didn't exist... (*recording interrupted, continued at a very low volume*)

The Canadian labor movement could (*have*) play(*ed an even*) more important role than it had in the radicalization of American workers. It should make an effort to spread the word to influence through assemblies of the American working class and tell them what it's doing in Canada – how it's building the labor party, how it's supporting the Cuban Revolution – how its doing all kinds of things. The struggle for Canadian trade union autonomy – we're going to build our own unions – independent, with full autonomous rights – that will fructify the American labor movement – because the idea that the American labor movement should be dominant in its relationship with Canada is an insult to American workers' most healthy sentiments of the American working class – we want to inspire those elements to move forward and launch a struggle against the Greens (*Green, the head craft union federation bureaucrat –ed.*), against the Reuthers (*a leading CIO figure –ed.*) – he's not the worst of course – Reuther was rather sympathetic, now that I've just said that, to the CCF and to the NDP. But the great bulk of the trade union brass never identified themselves with the strivings of the Canadian working class to the Left (*towards political action, the CCF –ed.*) (... *recording volume drops further*)

### **Max Armstrong, Marxist educator, in Ontario**

*WR: Can you tell me about Max Armstrong?*

Well I got to know Max Armstrong quite well – he came around and he became very much identified with the movement – came to all the Forums.



*WR: Was that around the time of the Krushchev revelations?*

Hmmm – Oh, I think it was before that. He came as a Marxist – I think he was impressed by our press, the class-struggle line, its Marxist character, and I think he came basically because he was re-thinking his views. He never became part of the Communist Party in the sense of its day-to-day activity – he joined the CP when the best elements became communists, and identified with the movement when it was founded – he was in the first body.

*WR: Out of college or something which led to the formation of the party?*

He was part of the Montreal left, and he was a sort of academic Marxist, you know – he was an educator – an elderly man when I knew him – I never knew him as a young man – but he was a solidly committed communist – a Marxist communist, **not** a class-struggle **activist** communist – and I think he joined us because we held our Forums for a period in the union hall which he was in charge of – he had connections very early in the CCF left, and some leading activists in the CCF looked after him – he was already an elderly man, and I think he got a job from them in maintaining the headquarters from one of the unions which had a headquarters up on Isabella Street – and we held our Forums there for a period when we didn't have a suitable headquarters – and we met him, talked to him and he read our literature and he joined us, and he was re-inspired by his connections with our movement, with young revolutionaries, you know (*speech emphasis*).

But he had not been active for some while – he had come through the Montreal experience of the early communist movement – not part of the Toronto movement. I don't think he was really part of it – I don't think he knew French, I doubt that, so he played a role in our movement, mostly an educational role – a participant in the Forums and things like that – graced our platform as one of the pioneers of Marxism.

*WR: It was a real coup to get one of the founding members of the Communist Party*

Well among **us**, who had a concept of ourselves that we were the continuers of the **real** communist movement – the real communist party cadre – which of course numbered Spector and Macdonald as the most prominent persons – so we had this concept of ourselves, and Max affirmed it – (*gave it*) material proof, although he didn't support Spector and Macdonald in the early days – I don't know why – I think for a period he was inactive – I never went into this with him (*speech emphasis*).

### **Malcolm Bruce, veteran Communist Party dissident, recruited in B.C.**

*WR: With Malcolm Bruce – he was quite a well-known figure in British Columbia*

Yes, he's the man who exposed “Sergeant” Leopold (*obviously not known by that name – ed.*) He lived on the West Coast for a considerable period of time, and he got integrated into the West Coast radical community and he knew some people in Frisco (*San Francisco*) – and he was down visiting them in Frisco and someone told him that (*there were*) persons at the social here tonight, Malcolm, who you'd like to meet – and it was this “Sergeant” Leopold, who was underground in Canada but who was known at this social as being in the RCMP and being in the Communist Party. Malcolm was the first person who acquainted himself with “Sergeant” Leopold, and knew who he was, and of course –

*WR: A member of the Communist Party?*

Yes, but not in the activist sense – he was acquainted with him at this social affair – (*where*) he was surprised ... (*knowing*) he was an RCMP agent – he told me this – I assume its true.

*WR: Unbelievable – this was in the 1920s?*

Well it was when they illegalized the Communist Party – its related in many of the books you know. “Sergeant” Leopold was living proof of the subversive and dangerous character of the CP of Canada

and Buck was I think sent to jail on the evidence of “Sergeant” Leopold – I’m almost positive Leopold appeared at the key evidence – he came to the court in his uniform as an RCMPper and he testified he knew about the top leaders and testified (*against*) Tim Buck – the CP was formally illegal. And so they sent Buck to jail along with I think nine – or eight people who were leading CPers – and “Sergeant” Leopold was chief evidence of it

*WR: The group found out later –*

Oh yes, I think he was the evidence – he was known as an RCMP agent very shortly – he couldn’t function very long – the movement was alerted to this possibility, but I know Malcolm was the person who first knew it – he brought it to the attention of the party leadership of course.

I met him in Vancouver some years later, when he joined the Canadian Trotskyist movement – and he was one of the old-timers in the CP – a leading CPer – I would say the first person I met who had been a leader in the *stalinized* Communist Party – like Spector and Macdonald and these people were leaders in the CP but they were driven out of the CP and very quickly became Trotskyists – but Malcolm Bruce remained in the CP. I didn’t know what the issues were – and only subsequently, in his maturity, (*he*) came to know what they were, and came over to the Trotskyist movement. And he made contact with us – I think he came into the CCF – and made contact with us in the CCF (*speech emphasis*).

*WR: (Was that) before the Moscow Trials?*

Oh, I think he came to us – oh yes, he supported the war – he came to us after the war, so he went through a considerable period of Stalinization – I don’t know what caused him to break – whether it was just continued relations with us, you know, I’m really not sure – the comrades in Vancouver got to know him, and they recruited him to the movement, and he played quite a role in the Trotskyist movement in B.C. before he died. But it was a late-blooming role, you might say.

*WR: If you go through the issues, we have the Moscow Trials, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, then the debate around Pabloism – the Khrushchev revelations – they’re all international questions – (for) the kind of people who were around or in the radical movement at that time – was the early Canadian question (a factor)?*

Well, the Canadian questions are big questions – now just what role they played in the evolution of people who had been in the CP I couldn’t say – for instance, the fiasco of conscription – the staggering role of the Communist Party, you know – for anybody who was a class-conscious worker couldn’t help but be disturbed by such a position – the “yes” vote on conscription – the “No Strike Pledge” that they made just prior to the war, not during the war – these positions couldn’t help but make some people hesitant and doubtful – maybe they didn’t break – but (*they were*) accumulative positions – so I’m not able to say what brought them over – for instance, Malcolm Bruce – I’m not sure what was the settling matter – he’s later maybe than the others – because I only met him well into the 40s – maybe into the edge of the 50s – I’d have to check – he played a bit of a role in the movement, because of course he was a very sophisticated political person – even though he was quite elderly – he was quite opinionated and (*a*) very vigorous-minded person – and I remember we had some controversies with him – we didn’t assimilate him very easily – he wasn’t a young person, he was a person who came on the basis of a long record of disillusionment you know – he broke with them (*the CP – ed.*), and he took our line and our views which he considered the continuation of his own views over the years which he didn’t grasp himself.

He was an unusual person, Malcolm Bruce – not the usual type we recruited from the CP – also Max Armstrong, you see – these people didn’t come out of a split in the CP – the CP was out to smash those forces which normally, in a democratic party open to an exchange of views and discussion, would coalesce – this didn’t happen in the CP – the history of the CP is one of destruction of cadre – not cadre

finding the possibility of coalescing and re-orienting as a group or a force.

I don't know of them – including Fergus McKeen, who published a book called *Communism and Opportunism* after the Browder experience (*the American CP crisis – Ed.*) – but he had some people around him, including some people who were collaborators with Fergus McKeen, but he'd been a leader of the B.C. section – but he didn't take any substantial (*forces*) – to my knowledge – and keep them and bring them to us. I think the persons who were in that experience, (*simply*) walked away. That's the long history of the CP – they have so destroyed the intellectual integrity and the capacity of people who were in this party who had disagreements – capacity to continue on effectively as revolutionaries and to mature – they just walked away.

I remember once there was one person – I've again forgotten their name – but (*our veteran comrade*) Jim Mitchell met this person in Montreal (*perhaps a comrade of dissident CP unionist Jean Gagnon – Ed.*) we made some real efforts to make contact with leading CP'ers and he was a leader – I forget this name unfortunately – but he told Jim Mitchell that he had been wrong – here's what he told him – sort of a testament – he'd been wrong, for so many years, so scandalously and so tragically wrong, that he now is not prepared to tell anybody what to do – and he walked away. We were telling people what to do! He was not prepared to do it – because he had been completely wrong on every question, you know – the CP's record was so rotten, that the revelations destroyed him – I would think that would be quite common in the (*Stalinist*) CP of Canada.

WR: (*inaudible comment about recruitment from political rivals – called “regroupment” at the time – Ed.*)

Out of that milieu – we didn't recruit many people from the CP – very few – the atmosphere was so poisonous you see. So, that was a major experience – the CP cadre had been dissipated. I can't think of one person who had been in the CP and been a leader or influential person that brought anything with him. We picked up the odd individual leader but not much.

WR: *If you look back on the 40s and 50s do you think it was a problem with Trotskyists was that they were not more “Canadian” or was it inevitable...? (inaudible)*

I think it was inevitable that the international questions were the questions that concerned the persons who had some experience in the radicalization – they are international questions because they were political questions you see – in Canada? Well, you see a person could be in the CP and satisfy himself he was doing some useful work in the union movement and other areas, because the CCF and NDP were not too attractive to persons who conceived of themselves as revolutionaries – the CCF-NDP was obviously a reformist party of some character, open to some radical ideas to some degree, and would be recognized by workers who were small “c” communist-minded, but it wouldn't attract them – they wouldn't (*be*) recruited to it – and anybody who was basically working in the CCF-NDP milieu, who was oriented to this movement as a basic break from bourgeois politics, and therefore an essential part of the process of the radicalization, they would not be too attracted. They'd be looked upon as somewhat right-wing by communist-minded workers – I would think.

Now Max Armstrong was a Marxist. Malcolm Bruce was a self-confident revolutionary communist – they were the exceptions that we picked up, but the general process that the Communist Party went under was one of continued dissipation of cadre – I think we would have to say that the CP was a devourer of revolutionary cadre, and a destroyer of revolutionary cadre – and didn't in any way sustain them for any period (*so*) that they could survive – didn't prepare them for the revelations and the demoralization that took place.

## Weathering the “Cold War” of the 1950s

*WR: Do you remember the “Cold War” – how did that start to hit you?*

Well, of course, the “Cold War” was a continuation of the “Hot War” – I mean, we were, in reality, illegal, during the War – in reality, as I think I said on the other tape – unlike in other countries – in Britain and the United States, the radical movement was illegal in Canada – we were illegal in Canada – so we just moved into the Cold War – it was nothing new.

*WR: Was there going to be a sharp right turn?*

Well it wasn't – it was a continuation – a situation where there was no obvious justification in anybody's mind, you know. During the War, people thought “well this is an unusual situation, it's necessary – they accepted it – but as it continued on, you'd have to call it a “Cold War,” and it became a phenomenon which was not relevant to the *real* feeling of people as to what conditions are, and what was required, and what was justified, in the curtailment of democratic rights, and the restrictions (against) the organized labor movement, etc. (*Speech emphasis*)

So the Cold War was not a changing situation for us – although it never really (*had*) the depth in Canada that it subsequently reached in the States of course – because of the very simple fact of the CCF, and there was a powerful labor movement, (*which*) underwent a considerable growth during the War, you know. In Canada – we didn't have an established and deeply rooted industrial proletariat in Canada, until the War. So this phenomenon rose during the War and consolidated itself on that basis, and of course the CCF had considerable influence and feed into it, so the Cold War didn't have the impact in Canada that it had in other countries.

*WR: Was it disappointing or demoralizing to people who anticipated there was going to be a revolution after the Second World War?*

Well, that's another thing, yes, *we* anticipated a revolution coming out of the Second World War – we were quite convinced that this was the next stage – as a matter of fact, our organization took a name which identified itself with this concept – at that time we called ourselves the “Revolutionary Workers Party” (*RWP* – *see W12*) – this was a common name through the forces of the Fourth International – right across the world, a common name – and we had really thought that this was going to come to pass – there was going to be a mass upsurge, and in more than one or two countries, there would be established workers' governments – governments moving on the plane of socialist legislation and socialist action – that's what we had contemplated – well of course it wasn't completely out to lunch.

For instance in France, as you perhaps know if you've read *Paris Burning* – quite a worthwhile book (*which*) gives a very vivid picture of what happened with the collapse of French bourgeois government and the rise of the Underground all during the war, and the growth of the communist movement, which then still considered itself communist – and everybody thought that France was going to go communist – but the Communist Party (*the Stalinists* – *Ed.*) supported DeGaulle! – They tried to establish a quasi – what would you call it? – a Bonapartist regime in France (*a military dictatorship straddling bourgeois, petit-bourgeois and proletarian parties* – *ed.*)

But the power was in the streets in France – it really was in the streets. In Yugoslavia of course the peasant resistance took power, destroying the King Peter regime, and defied Stalin who tried to get them to knuckle under to King Peter and to form a coalition with the reactionary bourgeoisie – so you had revolutionary upsurges, and of course you can't ignore China, which underwent a big ferment out of the War, and in a few years took power – the Chinese CP, at the head of the masses.

So our aspirations and our hopes and projections were not out to lunch – (*but*) they didn't take on the form we'd hoped – the Stalinists managed to survive, contrary to our speculation. We thought Stalinism in this upsurge would be destroyed – but it managed to survive and destroy certain elements of the revolutionary forces – you know, divert them, I should say the least.

So it was not completely an erroneous projection, but it didn't take the path we thought – and it certainly didn't take (*that*) path in America – we thought America would not be impervious to such events as in Yugoslavia, such events which almost took place in France, and even in Britain, as you know, was astonishing, the events in Britain, to most people – here was Churchill, at the peak of his power and popularity, and he goes to the electorate and he's defeated and thrown into the scrap heap of history – the (*British*) Labour Party sweeps into power – and everybody figured this was the continuation of it – so it was uneven, the development, you know.

### **The international split in the Fourth International around Pablo in the 1950s**

*WR: Was there a split in the Trotskyist movement at this time around questions about what happened after the Second World War, and the problems post-war?*

Well, the Trotskyist movement was stimulated by all political developments – (*it was an*) extremely democratic movement – so a common phenomenon of an international character were reflected in its ranks. For instance, it developed, even in the top leadership of the Trotskyist movement, a current that considered that the (*world*) revolution, with the rise of the nuclear bomb – was taking a new direction – going to take a new direction. They considered that perhaps World War Three was inevitable – that we were moving right into WW3, and so there's going to be a war, out of which will come a revolution. I was rather skeptical myself – I thought if we had this nuclear war there **wouldn't be** any revolution – couldn't possibly be a revolution in this nuclear war – but that view was held by Michel Pablo, who was a leading member of the Fourth International, and who had of course considerable influence in the ranks of the movement. He prepared a publication... (*speech emphasis*).

(*Pablo claimed*) it was inevitable now that nuclear war would take place, and he projected that the movement would have to re-consolidate itself with whatever revolutionary forces there were, and of course there would be revolutionary forces coming out of the communist (*existing Stalinist* –Ed.) movements, in such a profound crisis. So this led to a split in the International, and this influenced the Canadian party – for instance, leading members in the Trotskyist movement supported Michel Pablo and his current in the Fourth International, and this involved Jean-Marie Bédard and Murray Dowson and I forget who else – Joe Rosenthal...(inaudible)

*WR: What were the implications of this theory in Canada?*

Well it destroyed the perspective for a Trotskyist movement – we were trying to build a revolutionary socialist movement, a Trotskyist movement, and of course the Communist Party offered no possibilities for us to do serious work in it – and of course the whole theory didn't offer any opportunities for serious work – it was a completely pessimistic projection.

*WR: The theory was there was going to be a nuclear war between the US and Russia – (...) therefore try to do something in the CP (survive within the mass Communist movement –Ed.)*

Well, the War was more immediate than that – it didn't have the concept (*that*) the CP would be re-constituted or something, or the Soviet bureaucracy would play a revolutionary role – I don't think it was that so much – there was not going to be any time to build a Trotskyist party, which we had projected since 1938 – that was the general line – and there was going to be a revolution, there was going to be a re-alignment of political forces across the globe – therefore you had to have a more

sensitive orientation to the CPs – (*and*) out of all this catastrophe would come a new re-alignment of forces, and they wouldn't count – for some strange reason – they wouldn't count the social-democracy, so-called – wouldn't count the reformists – it would be the CPs even though subservient to Moscow – essentially a revolutionary orientation. So – it couldn't be taken seriously from the point of view of serious political work because we were to undergo a totally disruptive war of unprecedented scope and destruction – so the perspective was not a serious perspective from the point of view of building anything – “out of the ruins would come something” – but what, nobody knew.

*WR: (A question inaudible, about support for Pablo)*

Well, it won over several competent and leading comrades, but it didn't win the majority – they were defeated in a democratic debate and discussion – and of course an important factor in that was the influence of the SWP (*USA*) which never supported Pablo. In fact, Cannon launched an international campaign which the movement wasn't ready for – it suddenly burst on the movement – Cannon made the projection and rallied the forces that opposed Pablo very very early, and took the offensive. And Cannon's actions vis-a-vis the Canadian movement were very propitious from the point of view of the struggle against Pablo.

So Pablism didn't really find any support in the Trotskyist movement in Canada or the United States, contrary to the comments and drivel from certain ultra-leftists, who thought that everybody who didn't support their ultra-left and sectarian concepts were a form of Pablists – so many people were called “Pabloites” but they weren't. I was called a “Pabloite,” I had to struggle against it in the Canadian movement – it didn't mean anything – I mean I never even think of Pablism (*except as*) an episode in the history of the movement, but if you go around to the ultra-leftists who call themselves Trotskyists – they think Pablism is a living problem for the movement – but it was not, not an unimportant episode because it involved some important people, but in many ways the people who supported Pablo were on the way out of the movement, too.

It's not easy to build a revolutionary movement in Canada, you know, so people found excuses, found their tiredness, their exhaustion rationalized by doubts about the future perspectives of the groups that they'd been members of and participated in. I always thought that's what it was – a way (*out*) of the revolutionary movement. That debate didn't really take place in the Canadian movement – those comrades split from the Canadian movement – they went over to a conference called by Pablo, and they went on their own – and they didn't have the support of the party – the forces of the Canadian section –

I use the word “party” erroneously – we never called ourselves a “party” – we didn't consider we were a “party” in scope and (*in*) strategic position in Canadian politics. We considered that's why the NDP orientation was quite an important one, because that was the “party” – the CCF – that was *the* party of the Canadian working class – a mass labor formation, you know – not a revolutionary party, but a mass labor formation in which revolutionaries should participate (*speech emphasis*.)

*WR: Was it an accident that the differences on that question were between the North Americans and Europeans or – (inaudible)*

Never had that question before, and I never even thought about it. Pablo was a very impressive figure – I met him later on, when we carried out the unification – and he was an extremely sophisticated person (*with*) big experiences in the Greek revolutionary movement – he was the executive secretary – he was not some passing-chance leader – and of course his position of prestige reflected his connections and abilities and his skills – but he didn't carry the International – he didn't carry the majority, and ultimately he was defeated in a democratic debate in the movement when the debate started to take place – and he came back into the movement – as a matter of fact the movement attempted to absorb

him when it carried out a reunification which the Cannonites (*James P. Cannon, SWP founding leader – ed.*) – I suppose you'd call me a Cannonite at that time – formed a working relationship with the best elements remaining active (among) the Pabloites, you see – they were reunited. So...

In Europe, the movement didn't have any real basis – any connections – with the mass working-class movements. It was a movement, sometimes, of a galaxy of brilliant intellectuals. Cannon provided a pole – he was a worker-militant – had real experience in the Communist Party and the American Trotskyist movement – he developed a long tradition – and in that sense you'd have to say the American movement, which the Canadian movement considered itself close to, represented a more stable, a more mature, a more cautious, and more integrated current – the European movement was more mercurial, more composed of brilliant individuals and intellectuals – there's some truth in that – I wouldn't deny that – but we won the so-called brilliant intellectuals too, and we resolved that problem – and Pablo lost – he ended up with nothing.

### **Dowson's role in the international dispute with Pablo in Europe**

*WR: (inaudible...) How did the Canadian section of the International react?*

Well, the Canadian movement was caught unprepared, nonplussed by the struggle Cannon launched against Pablo; and it took us a little while to understand the full implications of Cannon's charges against Pablo. Looking back, we concluded that Cannon was correct, that the debate, and the split was a justified political split – although splits are not desirable, it was a justified political split.

But nonetheless you always thought in terms of the reunification of the movement, because the split was not on the fundamentals of revolutionary socialism – but on an evaluation of currents in the movement, so that when the moves towards unification started to be posed, we responded as best we could, and the comrades who agreed with us decided that they wanted to interfere (*intervene – Ed.*) seriously in a positive way to overcome the division.

So very early they appealed to me, as a leader of the Canadian movement, to play a role in this whole process – to overcome the division, because we knew that the division impeded the growth of the movement, not just in Canada but on a world scale; and there were new challenges before the Trotskyist movement. So they appealed to me to participate as a representative of their current – the American comrades appealed to me, and the Canadian movement made me available. On their request, I went over to Europe and I participated in the unification. I went over with the idea that the basis of unification was more favorable than it was. I knew the desirability of it, but I didn't know how practical it was. And when I went over there, I was astounded at how the Pablo group had undergone a degeneration in the dispute – Pablo was isolated now, even with regards to the other current. He was not the leading exponent any more – Pierre Frank, Livio Maitan – they were the leading persons, and they were for unification, so there was a real basis for the unification, and those persons who saw that situation to be prevalent, were correct.

I met these leading comrades with whom we had had no relationship with for some while, and we moved in in a very collaborative way – that's not to say there weren't problems, but the unification went ahead, and after a couple of years, getting to know the comrades, discussing the problems, (*what*) we thought were the differences, we came to a reconciliation of the forces. So the reunification was a success, and the Canadian movement played an important role. Now, we were ancillary to the main forces – the main forces were the SWP, and Maitan, and the French section, Pierre Frank and Mandel who has tremendous connections on a world scale – so we participated as part of what you might say was the 'Cannon current' in the International. This was a big experience for me...

WR: *(inaudible question about the Fourth International operation in Europe)*

Yes, I had never been to Europe – I had never met sophisticated exponents of Trotskyist views in the flesh – I had come to Trotskyist opinions on the basis of my membership of a small section that didn't have any real connections with the International. We supported the International – we published the statements and declarations – we participated in financial drives that were appropriate for some years in the earlier days, but I never really knew what the International was in real life – it was an idea, as far as I was concerned, and Trotsky was the symbol of the need for unity and aspirations of *(revolutionaries)*, from the new *(forces which)* understood the importance of the Fourth International.

So I went over and learned a great deal – I stayed there off and on over a couple of years – I stayed in the centre, I worked with Mandel who was an extremely sophisticated political person, and I met the French comrades who were undergoing a growth that never had existed before in France in the Trotskyist movement, La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire – is that what it was called? Yes, it was – these comrades had come out of the student struggle in 1968 – we had big connections – I stayed with Krivine several times, met his co-thinkers, his confrères.

WR: *(inaudible question) Did you learn...?*

Codify it? That's very difficult. I didn't learn French, because – I was dismayed to find that I cannot hear French – I tried to learn French – (but) I wondered what was wrong with me – I have a hearing problem which makes it difficult to learn French. I couldn't codify it, really.

*(But the experience)* reaffirmed my views – reaffirmed by orthodox Trotskyist views – and re-established my confidence that we could build an International worthy of our ideology.

WR: *(What did they think of you) coming from the colony of Canada?*

Colony? I don't think they know what Canada is really about – I think they think it's part of the United States, so they don't have an opinion of Canada as distinct from the United States – I was part of the American comrades – as you know there was some truth in this feeling because at one time the Canadian section *was* part of the American section, in the early days – it didn't have its own independent existence in the early days *(voice emphasis)*.

I'm not sure when this was established, when the Canadian movement established itself as a section – probably based on that experience it was as close as it ever did, on that basis I was in constant contact with them over a period of time and I met the leading comrades, and I wrote articles for the *World Outlook (a Trotskyist news magazine which)* was started by the International unification conference, and I was one of the three comrades who were assigned to put it out, and it was put out weekly – no, every other week I guess – put out in Paris, and Hansen and I, Reba Hansen and an Indian comrade who was assigned this work put the paper out – a news service, really – and it gradually became more sophisticated and more general – and that was a very important decision of the unification – to publish *World Outlook*, which subsequently became known as *Intercontinental Press*.

WR: *So you were one of the founding members of that publication. Was there a reason you were asked to go? Was it because you were from Canada or because Canada had a special contribution to make?* I don't think they knew Canada had some special contribution – they wanted a genuine unification and the unification couldn't be based on just the American comrades, so that was important that Canada become part of the process, to make the process real instead of artificial, you know.

WR: *At this time Trotskyism is still centrally defined by... Unification didn't have any special significance for Canadian development... (end of question inaudible)*

No, Canada's not a known issue in the International, you know – I think that generally the comrades – I



don't have a consensus that this was ever an issue – I as a representative of the Canadian section was genuinely integrated in the process of reunification, and of course the American comrades considered we were important because they had always helped the Canadian movement move forward when it had opportunities and challenges – and subsequently of course there were running relations with the American comrades of a more profound character than ever before – for years even our relations with the American comrades was – what would you call it – sporadic – there wasn't a real collaboration, integrated with the leadership of the two sections – that never took place until this experience.

*WR: Is there any special contribution or role you played (as a Canadian ...)*

Well, comrades had a real feeling for the International – the need for an International – and we were not an appendage of the American party – nobody would have suggested that – we represented something substantial because we existed, we published a paper, we had carried out some very good actions, and we were respected, aside from the wish – which was enough itself to make it practical and demanding on us – but they had no idea that we had some specific, unique Canadian contribution – for instance the experience we had in the NDP and the CCF – that was a non-issue – it was accepted – our line on the NDP and CCF over the years was part of the whole picture – this is the record of the Canadian section, and no one challenged it. It was only later, after the unification took place, and when there was a new dispute in the International, that the question of the orientation to the NDP became an issue at all.

Mandel surprised me when he attacked the orientation, (*along*) with Riddell and others, I don't want to go into this now – when they suggested the orientation had an element of liquidationism in it – as a matter of fact, Mandel went quite far, which showed me that I didn't think Mandel had real political savvy – tactical political savvy – he had a profound **theoretical** understanding of the real world political issues, but I don't think he had any organizational concepts of any great value (*speech emphasis*).

(*See W2 for polemics against ultra-leftism and the Mandel F.I. leadership on Latin America. Also: "In defense of the LSA c.1973 by J.D. in Forward Group Archives2 -Box 25 – Ed.)*

*WR: Did you get any sense of (being) 'an American in Paris' or (an apostle) on the Canadian labor movement in Canada?(end of question inaudible)*

No, you see, I was helping publishing this bulletin, and we were in reality passing on news to the International – to people who had use for it – the newsletter – and it also gave direction, because it reflected the views and opinions of the top cadre of the International, (*which*) functioned in Brussels and in Paris, so on the question of Algeria, it had some leadership to give, because our French comrades followed the Algerian developments very closely – this had to be developed, the authority of the International centre had to be developed over a period of years – at that time, we were just re-establishing it. I would say my contribution as the leader of the Canadian section was not along specific, spelled-out concrete lines on understandings or conceptions; it was not based on that; I was a Trotskyist, a long-standing Trotskyist – that's what I participated as.

### **Dowson advocates an F.I. orientation to the British Labour Party in England**

Oh yes, I ground the axe on certain grounds, on my opinions on the British comrades. I mean I tried to convince the British comrades that they had to be in the British Labour Party, and I remember a couple of times, Hansen thought I was too sharp on the British comrades – like, I selected news and information on what was happening in Britain that was slanted, in my opinion, analytical, from the point of view of convincing the British comrades to go into the Labour Party. And that caused a little bit of unease, because some of them didn't have any concept of being in the Labour Party.

I don't know what influence I had in that; sure, yes, there were some concrete examples of international solidarity, on the basis of my experience in Europe, and in collaboration with European comrades, that are worth commenting on. For instance, the British section was very weak over the years – everybody knew the British section was a very important section, not only because a core of comrades who were experienced and dedicated, and *(being)* in a strategic country, you know – all countries are not equal in the sense of revolutionary politics and revolutionary impact – the British section was of considerable importance to us, to us all, all our understandings...

So the Canadian comrades took the British – should I say it that way? No, its somewhat patronizing – *(we)* tried to specialize, tried to concentrate their concern and interest in the work of the British comrades, and we took it upon ourselves to help colonize the British comrades' work – we sent some comrades over – not that we had very big forces – we wanted to develop our cadre – *(but)* there's nothing like having International experience to bring about development of people. We sent – at one time we had about five persons going from Canada to Britain – some of them had been British workers who came from England – Irish, Scots – we sent them back to England to work in the British section. They had come to the Trotskyist movement through the work of the Canadian movement, which was rather satisfying to us of course, to think we helped establish a more effective International by encouraging comrades who may have had no experience in those respective nations' activity and work, but who became Trotskyists, and we sent them back – they wanted to go back, and some of them are still playing a rather prominent role.

As a matter of fact there was an interesting 'letter to the editor' in BIDOM,\* one of the journals that now is coming out of the States, an excellent letter – this is a comrade who is a very young comrade who we recruited, for many years an invalid, and uneducated – we educated him – this is a rather interesting experience – he was anxious to learn, one of the most remarkable persons I ever met, a worker, and our comrades taught him how to write, how to speak – he was in the UE (*United Electrical Workers, Stalinist-dominated*), he got a job in Amalgamated Electric, and he became a union leader and some of the women comrades who were school teachers took him under their wing and taught him how to speak and taught him how to write and he became a leader in the UE in Canada, here – took on Jackson, a very serious political person, carried our view – our line, into the union, and that was rather an interesting experience,\*\* but the other colonizations were even more significant.

*\*BIDOM, the monthly magazine of one of 3 groups of SWPers expelled from the party by the Barnes leadership in the 1980s – Ed.)*

*\*\*a reference to a young British worker Pat Brain recruited to the SEL in the early 1960s – see photo W18 -1961 – Ed.*

### **The subsequent role of Canadian comrades in the British Left into the 1960s**

For instance in the early days of the anti-Vietnam War forces in Britain (they) were led by comrades who came from Canada – Ernie Tate\* and Alan Harris – these were Canadian comrades who went back to England and played an up-front role. If you ever study the anti-Vietnam War movement you'll find their names are on the top ranks – they became convinced Trotskyists in Canada and went back to Britain – a very interesting experience. I'm glad you raised that – I keep forgetting that. Alan Harris is a leading comrade in Britain still – comrade Pat Brain, a leading comrade, and Ernie Tate, who played a very leading role in Britain – he's now back in Canada – they played a role – I have several photographs of the anti-Vietnam Committee work in London, which caused a lot of tension of course in the British bourgeois press – I have some photographs that were taken of the leading cadre – three or four of them were Canadian comrades who played a big, up-front role. (\*See Tate's two-volume *Memoires of his experiences in the Canadian and British left: Revolutionary activism in the 1950s and*

1960s, *Resistance Books*, London, 2014)

## The Trotskyist movement's first bookstores in the 1950s

WR: *What have you done (...in establishing radical bookstores?)*

Yes, it was quite a stimulating period from the point of view of poetry – and the youth radicalization in developing. I guess that's what it is – but of course our bookstore was attractive, too. Our bookstore concentrated on left books, but it was broad. I tried to select books for the store which would be of interest to radicals no matter what their particular, specific concerns were, and so the stores we had, which started to expand across the country – we always set up a bookstore – and the headquarters of the movement would always be associated, or connected with the store, so they became sort of centres.

WR: *Were there bookstores in the 1940s?*

Well, maybe early 50s – probably that's when it (*started*). We did have a couple of bookstores in that early period. I remember in Toronto when we set up the first bookstore on Elm Street – this would be very early, shortly after we opened up a bookstore on King Street opposite the *Star* building. I remember once during our (*civic*) election campaign our headquarters was in this building, right across from the editorial rooms of the *Star*; and they were broadcasting election results and so we were listening to it as we were taking the polls and bringing people around to the headquarters, and the *Star* reporter commented how he was right opposite from the “Dowson For Mayor” campaign office, just a stone's throw from Bay Street – I remember this rather vividly – so we had bookstores just after that.

WR: *Were you using bookstores as an organizing concept?*

Oh yes, well, it was very practical, we wanted to face the public, we wanted to become known, and besides promoting our literature and the bookstores of course were vehicles for our ideas, we were publishing a paper regularly at that time, and we were bringing in American literature – selective literature from all the lists of the major publishers which were developing quite a few books of a radical character – so the bookstore became a centre for radicals, wherever we were establishing them, and we always attached our headquarters close by the bookstore, usually (*as*) part of the bookstore.

When we set up bookstores of course we wanted them to be up front, so that a passer-by, our clientele, (*would see us*) in a central section of the community. These bookstores were quite popular, and they became the face of the movement, because usually we got facilities which were central, in a good location, but we couldn't afford the rents normally – we (*rented*) just ahead of the (*wrecking balls*) destruction projects of real estate corporations. They were now expanding central areas of the city, remodeling, reestablishing, building large buildings, and we moved in just before they tore out the old buildings that were going down the drain, and we did that because they were very cheap at that time, because nobody would take them unless they had a good lease – they wouldn't give you a decent lease, you see – you were subject to immediate eviction if they wanted to start building – they were gathering up the properties and sitting on them, waiting to build – and so we sat with them, (*laughs*) in these facilities, which were quite good, like we had a bookstore practically right on the corner of Yonge Street and College (*RD means to say 81 Queen Street West, and later 334 Queen Street West near Spadina – Ed.*) – we had another right across from Britnell's at Bloor and Yonge, the most sophisticated, high-priced area in the City of Toronto today, and we just preceding the building of the New City Hall when that was going up (*at 81*) Queen Street (*West*). So we had good locations, and we had good facilities – the hall across from the New City Hall was a fantastic hall, right downtown (...)

## **The growth of the movement's bookstores and Forum hall centres**

We might get the (*eviction*) notice tomorrow – that happened at the place we had on the corner of College and Yonge – we weren't in there two months before we were kicked out – but in other ones we established ourselves for five-six years. So it was worth the task, you know, to move the books and move our headquarters.

*WR: Was that a new concept -- what did the Communist Party do?*

Well, they had bookstores but they didn't have facilities such as we had.

*WR: (inaudible question about our being the only Left bookstore)*

No, it was inevitable that the radical movement would set up bookstores, promoting their own writings, which weren't accepted in the general book trade, you know – and they usually had their own publishing house, you know, so it was common for them to have bookstores, but not on the scale we did, and we had them cross-country as the movement expanded, which it did, due to the radicalization. We had a network of bookstores in all the major cities, you know – so it was in that sense, new – and they were bookstores with some sophistication.

*WR: Can you tell me about the book trade, and Canadian publishing in the 1940s and '50s as they started – it think it was quite a different book market situation than that of today...*

Well, you know, the radical books now are established in all the book publishers – they all have radical books on their lists – but when we started the bookstore, we insinuated or planted, within the book publisher's lists, the other agencies, which were radical agencies – we integrated them, so we carried out by a synthesis what subsequently became a reality for the big publishers. As the radicalization continued, the big publishers started to recognize that radical books were merchandisable, and profitable. But we had pioneered earlier than that by just taking their books and putting our books in with them, and integrating them in the bookshelves – so our bookstore had that radical character. Maybe we started to promote this synthesis, I don't know.

*WR: But in the 1940's (inaudible)*

Yes, radicals books we integrated in the shelves.

*WR: Was there a radical public?*

Well, it was growing, and of course I was there and I didn't just sit there – when people seemed interested, I had discussions with them and talked to them, about our views, and about the character of the various books – so there was sort of a running evaluation of available literature, and what I, or others, thought of as useful, from the point of view of knowledge, and participation in the radicalization in the labor and union movement – and so they took on that character.

## **The movement's Forums and its press\***

*(\*see W14 for a selection of articles and W13 for subject indexes over 50 years – Ed.)*

And then we had Forums in the rear – we had big facilities, a big space – for instance, opposite the New City Hall – we had (*what*) I think had been a big record store – they had bins and everything, excellent fixtures in the store – and it had a basement which was a high basement – we had so much space we couldn't fill it, and it was very reasonable, and so we started to fill it, with archives of the radical movement, and with books in one section, and with Forums in another section, classes on another night, you know – so they became centres of activity – so we made use of all the facilities which, up to then, we had never been able to obtain – it was with the real estate expansion that we

moved in behind, you see, that we picked up excellent facilities and we were able to use these excellent facilities because we were sensing the developing radicalization in the country.

I must say of course, our press and our Forums were always oriented as part of the union movement, and part of the NDP – for instance, when we started to publish *Labor Challenge* right after the War, it was oriented to the CCF – that's what the line of the paper was – it discussed all the problems of the CCF – at that time the CCF was undergoing a stimulating growth and stimulating controversy – I can't think of some of the incidents particularly, but in B.C. there were a series of big struggles in the CCF as the leadership moved to the right, and the Left galvanized its forces. And, we became spokespersons for the Left – if I'd thought to prepare it, I could have given you some of the material on it, and refresh my own mind –

Our press became a very important factor – there were groups of radicals across the country who started to use our press, and we addressed our press to them – for instance, later on, I went down to the founding convention of the New Democratic Party and we did a **big** coverage of it – I think our coverage was the best coverage that appeared anywhere – and we followed these developments, and people sent us material. For instance we had friendly relations with Colin Cameron, who was a founder of the CCF and who was a leader of the Left (*in B.C.*) at that time – a very popular and powerful figure (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: (question on our press coverage of CCF personalities – inaudible)*

Well, I can't think of any personal ones, but we published the material they put out, we gave it wide circulation through our press – we followed all the developments in the CCF, and of course everybody who was around our movement – it was understood in our movement, in the League for Socialist Action, that you would logically be a member of the CCF – it was the first thing you'd do – the first approach I gave to anybody was “are you a member of the CCF?” and that became the entree into our milieu – it became the minimal requirement of anybody, you know – and all of us were activists and involved in the CCF – on a running basis.

### **Literary figures around and inside the movement**

*WR: Quebec was also the home province of Irving Layton, who I believe was associated with Trotskyist views in this period.*

Well, there were a group of persons who had been around the CP, and they were breaking from the CP – again, I can't recall some of their names – some of them were quite significant personalities, but of course you couldn't help but know Layton – and I met Milton Acorn at that time, and also this other poet who was a close friend of Milton Acorn – he's now quite prominent – what the hell is his name? You know him. (...) But they were petty-bourgeois types you know – open to radical ideas, interested in Trotskyism, in revolutionary socialism, interested in Quebec nationalism – all these matters – I didn't really get to know them – I went to a couple of meetings, I gave some talks to them about our views, and that was pretty well it although one of them I got to know better, and that's the guy whose name I can't remember. (*laughs*) and he's a very prominent poet now. You would know him now right off the reel, the most prominent in Canada – yes, Al Purdy – he was in this circle – I think. (*A statue of Purdy has been erected at the North end of Queen's Park in Toronto – CEO*).

*WR: The 1940s we're talking about? Yes, I would think that's when it is (Actually, it was the '50s – CEO). WR: Can you think of anything about Irving Layton?*

Not particularly – you know, I wasn't interested in poetry at the time – I was interested in talking to them about politics – they were very friendly, but I lost connection with them for a period – and I never

did renew connections with Irving Layton, but I got to know Al Purdy better.

*WR: Can you talk about him?*

Well, he's a very silent person – I really didn't get to know him in any kind of depth – he was very friendly, interested in our ideas – I remember once he came into the (*book*) store on Queen Street – some while later – but he'd been away for a period and he had come back to see me and shoot the breeze, and he told me he was very anxious to have a talk because he didn't know what to think – he'd been away for so long, out in the field. He was very sincere type of guy, interested in radical ideas. But again, I never knew these people well. Joe Rosenblatt I knew very very well, because Joe was a member of the group, active in the Trotskyist youth movement – very active, not just interested in poetry, which Milton told him all about.

Milton Acorn was a *serious* poet, (which) he impressed me as concerned with the poetic methods of expression – and he talked to Joe quite a bit. And of course he was a more active, overt political person – Milton. Joe was a completely integrated Trotskyist – it was only later that he moved away into abstract poetry and dilly-dallying with word-play, in his poetry, which was quite a disappointment to most of the persons around the movement. But Milton was not only a sophisticated poet but was a revolutionary type – he again was unfortunately an unstable person – we never recruited Milton to our movement – not in Toronto – he used to come to the Forums and participate in them – but we knew he was a very emotionally unstable person – so we purposely didn't recruit him (*voice emphasis*).

But Milton went out to the West Coast and was recruited by the Vancouver comrades, to my surprise – recruited by them – when he came back again, he was going down the drain – he was for a long period extremely unstable, and I saw him just before – I forget what year – he came to Toronto from Vancouver, having been absent for a long time, and he was not writing anything, so he came around the (book) store and we shot the bull, and I told him you know why don't you write something – there's lots to write about from the socialist labor point of view – so he said “what's the theme?” So I said you know the Canadian labor movement is headed for a General Strike – this was against Trudeau's wage freeze, you see – what could be better as a theme for a good poem, by you? Because, Milton was an experienced unionist also – he wasn't just a radical, a revolutionary socialist, he wasn't just a poet, but he was a unionist and had some considerable experience in the Left.

So he said OK, I'll think it over. I said: come down and see the next day – we're just coming to the deadline of the General Strike. So I went down to see him, and he handed me this poem. He turned to me and said “You know, you're the first person I ever accepted an assignment from, as a poem – and this is the poem I accepted as an assignment – I think its a good poem, and go ahead and publish it. So we got it printed up, into the leaflet, and we circulated it to the demonstrators, to all the radical workers who came out on the demonstration in Toronto on the General Strike – so he was very very pleased you know that he had been able to write something that had some meaning to the working class, which of course he was completely tied to. I thought that was interesting (*laughs*).

*WR: On Joe Rosenblatt -- Can you tell me something about what he was like?*

Well, Joe was quite a young person, of course – quite a bit younger than Milton, a very Jewish young person, you know, cultured, interested in Judaism, not too articulate, very emotional, a serious poet – I remember he and Milton had many, many talks on the realm of poetry. He was an activist in the youth group, in the Young Socialists – very active; as a matter of fact, he and Milton carried a campaign for free speech in the parks – which was quite a dramatic campaign.

WR: *When was that?*

Here again I can't give you the year, you see, you caught me off guard, but we carried quite a campaign – we were the Young Socialists and the League for Socialist Action, tried to hold meetings on street corners where we could in Toronto. There were a couple of parks which were designated as open for public speaking – so we went and moved in on them – and Pat Schulz became an excellent popular speaker – that's where I saw her talents in this very clearly, and I spoke quite often, and Joe mobilized the poets, and so the poets made a big issue of freedom of speech and poetic expression – they were linked in, you see – and we won it – there were restrictions on the use of the parks, again I'm not sure of the details, but it became a free speech issue and the City Fathers backed off, the police backed off, on restricting freedom of speech in the parks – High Park was another one of the parks – there were just a couple of them where you could speak – but it really took place in Allan Gardens, just down the way here.

Joe (*Rosenblatt*) played a big role in that, and that became quite sensational – again I forget the exact episodes – I think several people were picked up (*arrested*), held for a short while, but it became sort of a dramatic incident, and the rallies in the park were quite large, and at the same time around the same period, I guy by the name of Beatty, who was a fascist – he started to move into the park and hold speeches – he was an anti-semitic, of course, a real fascist – and there were demonstrations in the park against his ideas – and they became part of the freedom of speech (*campaign*) for the poets. But it was a dramatic episode. I'd have to get some cold facts (*as to the details*).

WR: *That was in the early 60s...*

Probably (*see a photo of Ross speaking at the Robert Burns monument in Allan Gardens, Toronto, c. 1960 at W18 in the archives –Ed.*)

WR: *why did Joe Rosenblatt leave the movement?*

I don't know – it was a sort of osmotic process, gradual process – he had no big differences with us – he became more and more involved with poetry – he became prominent – I don't know what has happened to him now, but for a period he was one of the most aggressive, most popular and stimulating poets among the younger generation – and he had a circle of people around him who were poets – I don't know what was happening generally to stimulate this process at that time, but certain things were happening that stimulated the growth of a group of radical poets, and Joe was one of the leading persons in this circle – he eventually went out to the West Coast and I lost contact with him – for a while he always came around the bookstore.

What we had were bookstores across Canada, in the League for Socialist Action. I should say something about that. What you're taking down now makes out that Dowson was a real house-on-fire, doing this and that and this – but really the base of my activity, its central focus and what stimulated it was the League for Socialist Action, which I was the Executive Secretary of, and the Young Socialist, which I had a running relationship with, and they were very effective and dynamic groups – the Young Socialists particularly. What period are we in?

WR: *I'd like to keep it in the late 40's and early 50's for now. Can you explain to me why so many poets would have been attracted to the Trotskyist movement (...)?*

Well, now that we're documenting it, I suppose we should try to explain it, but I've never had an occasion to. For instance, this other fellow who was a poet of some significance, a rather low-key poet, Toronto's poet – I forget his name too – he came around too (*again, Al Purdy – ed.*) – he came around too. I wouldn't know exactly why this happened – it probably came about because of Milton, because Milton was quite an aggressive poet who tried to further interest in poetry as such, and was a skilled

poet, a knowledgeable person, and so he was attractive to other persons developing an interest in poetry as a form of expression, and of course it was part of the developing radicalization, the youth radicalization – it didn't suddenly come on the scene, you know, it was a process – the new generation was radicalizing – and I suppose poetry a la Kerouac – the Beat Poets, like “Howl” – Ginsburg – I suppose they were part of the whole. I remember we sold quite a few copies of “Howl,” which you will recall – a very powerful poem.

### **Dowson's interest in the world of art**

*WR: Personally if I understand correctly you were very much interested in following art developments – did this have an impact on you or your politics?*

Well I was part of the “vanguard” you might say in every area. I became interested in art. The school art teacher at York Memorial was a very open person, and I started to become quite interested in the artistic renaissance in Mexico, around Diego Rivera and Orozco. And of course I became acquainted with Picasso and other persons. The first speeches I gave were on art, strange to say, rather than politics – I don't think I knew much about it, but I spoke on it anyway.

The big artistic renaissance was in Mexico under Diego Rivera, which subsequently became even more important to me because Diego Rivera was instrumental aside in leading the renaissance in Mexico along with Orozco, he became in ideological agreement with Trotsky, and he was instrumental in saving Trotsky from Stalin's hands. He opened the doors of Mexico through Cardenas, the president of Mexico, to give him refuge in Mexico. Trotsky was harassed – Stalin used his diplomatic powers and authority of the Soviet Union to drive him from France, and drive him from everywhere – and finally Rivera stood up and got Trotsky a place in Mexico.

But I was interested in art – I collected reproductions – I was interested in modern art of course – I was a “vanguard” – I was consistent – I was not interested in the great classic paintings, but I was interested in innovation and new concepts – whether I understood or not was not the key question – I tried to understand it – I took up art classes in school, I went to special instructions – the teacher at York Memorial was interested in promoting art – she brought Arthur Lismer to the school and several other artists – a young artist I can't recall his name, a young artist who died recently. This was a personal matter with me – I didn't find artistic circles of satisfaction in ideas – so it was academic.

*WR: Did many people associated with the Trotskyist movement go on to play a role in the arts?*

That sustained my interest, too, because in the States some leading artists, leading writers, leading cultural figures became Trotskyists or came on the periphery of Trotskyism. For instance there's Dwight Macdonald – the Depression, the crisis of capitalism – had a worldwide effect and it stimulated radical creative forces, like Ignazio Silone who wrote *Fontamara*, like Orwell – there's a whole group of these people who were sophisticated politicals, and some of them became peripheral elements to the Trotskyist movement and supported causes with which the Trotskyist movement identified.

I think I was the person who first brought *Partisan Review* into Toronto, which subsequently became a very important force in the radicalization of cultural circles in North America and even on a world scale. But I brought it in, because I was interested in it. Trotsky wrote the first article – in the first issue, an article on 'Art and Socialism.' I circulated that – and I brought it in and got Lichtman's (*bookstore*) to handle it – but it took off on its own, you know. It was a personal interest which I have retained but its a side issue – like you can see the walls in my room here and they are graced by reproductions of the Rivera frescoes, which in my opinion are the most important art works of our time. There's Rivera there, there's Picasso there and a couple of others but basically Rivera. (*I said*) Canadians should go to



the Detroit Museum to see Diego Rivera's frescoes.

Canadians should go to the Detroit museum to see them. I went to see them – because they had become a 'cause celebre' – Rockefeller interests – some of the daughters who were well-to-do – developed an interest in art, and they were in contact with Rivera and Irosco and they made the way open for Rivera to paint the frescos in Rockefeller Centre which became a 'cause celebre' in the artistic world. The Rockefellers made available to Rivera – and they also tried to get Picasso, and Matisse, to help paint – decorate – their Rockefeller Centre, which was a major building in New York by the Rockefellers. Rivera agreed to it – I think Picasso and Matisse thought their work wasn't too adjustable to the hullabaloo and crisis atmosphere in New York and the walls of the New York building, but Rivera did – he painted his frescoes.

But, strange to say – it startled the world – the Rockefellers decided that they didn't like the frescoes of Rivera, although they were well acquainted with their theme – and Rivera had developed a theme and told them about it – but one time he came down just as the paintings were going to be finished, and he was barred (*entry*). And of course the artistic world was infuriated because (*they saw*) art belonging to humanity – including Rivera's art. And, there was big protests and demonstrations at Rockefeller Centre.

*WR: Among artists in Toronto, were any of them interested in labor painting or social (subjects)?*  
Barry Lord has written a book on Canadian art – it's a mechanical attempt to present a very radical tradition – he became a Maoist – he was the editor of 'Arts Canada' I think it was called, and I remember writing a major review of this book (*in an early issue of Forward c.1975 – Ed.*) – it's a fabricated book; it doesn't reflect the real forces at work in Canadian society – there were some artists who were radical, radical not only as artists but radical in ideas – but they were not a predominant force you know – you could count them on your hand – the major artist was of course Emily Carr, she was a rebel, a bohemian type, a great artist in my opinion – Lauren Harris I think was probably one of the most stimulating painters in Canadian history – he was the son of the Massey-Harris family – not a radical in social thought but a radical painter – the first abstract artist in Canada – not that I thought abstract art was radical – it was sort of a dead end, but it was a protest against the standard accepted bourgeois concepts of art. I don't think this was too significant – it reflected what was happening in the States.

For instance, Rivera had a big impact in the art world in the United States. I recently picked up a book put out by the Museum of Modern Art and there's a chapter in there on "the impact of Rivera." There was a whole school of fresco painters who had the walls of American government buildings made available under the WPA (*the depression-era program –ed.*) which was a relief project to meet unemployment, and the American government financed the decoration of American public buildings – some of the most important artists became part of that – they were influenced by Rivera.

*WR: are there any such frescoes in Canada?*

I can't think of a single fresco or any public painting, a painting accessible to the public – I can't think of one. There possibly are some, but it wasn't a substantial movement. The frescoes of Diego Rivera in Detroit brought together – Diego had the concept of a team, and a man of big, bold, concepts you see – and he wanted to present the impact of capitalism on culture, and he had this opportunity to paint the Detroit frescoes, and subsequently, with the money he got from that, he painted the frescoes in New York. He took the money from Rockefeller, who destroyed the frescoes in Rockefeller Centre, and he painted a series of frescoes in the new Workers' school which was a school set up by Jay Lovestone, one of the right opposition to the communist movement – he (*Rivera*) was coming to the position of

Trotskyism – the Left Opposition – Rivera was. He had a school of painters around him – Jean Charlot (*and Orozco*), a whole group of painters – and they were more important than I even thought – I wasn't aware of the impact of Rivera on this *school* of modern fresco painting – a renaissance in America. It's in detail in this book (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: No renaissance in Canada?*

Not to my knowledge – it had some effect – I'm sure some of these artists were aware of it – they probably even protested the destruction of the Rivera frescoes, but I wasn't ever aware of it.

#### REFERENCES:

1938-*The Labor Party in America*, by Leon Trotsky – discussions with the SWP (US) – Annotations by Ross Dowson – SEE: W5 #7

1972-Dowson, Ross: Talk #1: “The struggle to build a party of the class,” pp.1-27, in *The Labor Party and the Struggle for a Socialist Canada*, Forward Group, 2005 at W5-Labor Party Pt. 1 RTF & HTML

1972-Dowson, Ross: Talk #2: “The development of the CCF,” pp.29-61, in *The Labor Party and the Struggle for a Socialist Canada*, Forward Group, 2005 at W5-Labor Party Pt. 2 RTF & HTML

#### PHOTOS at W18

- c.1954b      Ross relaxing at Capilano park North Van, a 10-hour flight to visit BC comrades
- c.1955-1      RD likely proposing new name (SEL) to leading Toronto militants-- (l-r)  
Paddy Stanton, Joe Rosenblatt (25), Gerry Houle, Harry Paine, (unknown seated), Jim Mitchell, (couple seated facing away --perhaps Alan Harris & Pat Mitchell (the SEL-Ontario and the SIC-BC fused to become the LSA in 1961) (*photo from Joe Rosenblatt, probably in bookstore basement at 569 Yonge St.*)
- c. 1955-2      RD election photo with union (shop) "bug" appearing in new *Workers' Vanguard* newspaper (*After a 3-year publishing hiatus in Trotskyist journals*)
- 1956          SEL mayoralty campaign; Jerry Houle (front), Ernie Tate, Pat Mitchell
- c. 1958-1      Vanguard Bookstore on Queen Street West (*among old buildings facing future site of the new City Hall, probably Pat Brain standing in front*)
- 1970-7      Max Armstrong, veteran Marxist educator
- 1971-5      Tableau on “Origins of Canadian Trotskyism:” Leading personalities and its Journals

## Part 7 The formation of the New Democratic Party in 1961

*WR: Can you tell me some of your recollections of the period that led to the formation of the NDP in 1960-1961.*

Well there are a couple of interesting episodes – for instance, we had always supported the NDP – the CCF – always supported – critical support, but support nonetheless – like you'd say “a rope supports a hanging man” – some people used that phrase – I thought that's excessive because we didn't think the man was hanging – we supported the CCF, which disturbed many radicals – they thought we shouldn't. But we did, and when the CCF was dumped by the leadership in favor of the New Party, a big question mark came around it – but we continued our position of support because we considered the New Party was a progressive development – it was a new fusion – if I'm not mistaken, it came out of the success of (David) Lewis and others to bring the AF of L into the CIO, together, to back the CCF, and so it was a qualitative situation – I'd have to think it over, but I think that's it pretty well (...)

*WR: At that convention of the CLC we said we should form a new party of labor and progressive forces, and that the CCF was not -- (inaudible)*

So it opened the door for the AF of L-TLC to come into the milieu, which they did – which therefore was a very important development – favorable – yes, we situated it properly – that was what was my general impression – but we supported the development of the “New Party” – as it was first called, through a process – and there was some kind of discussion – I remember it wasn't too fruitful, but the idea of a new party was put forward by the CCF leadership, with the CLC, and so – we thought it was a good thing – to bring the AF of L together into a combined operation, and increase the power of the idea of independent labor political action – that's the essence of the question – so we supported it all down the line, in that sense.

Now there were some persons who were CCFers, who considered it a sell-out – there were a considerable number of persons in the CCF who were opposed to the labor connection – they considered labor was right-wing, they considered themselves socialists, and so the labor movement, the union movement, was reformist, and there was a false dichotomy there. We considered that the CCF didn't have any monopoly – no merit as the only force – we considered it more important that the CCF take into its bosom the *entire* labor movement, become *really* and profoundly and truly a labor party, even if it meant moving to the right to some degree – it would be even justified, although we had no part in that process – it would even be justified. So our tendency was to beat the drum for the New Party, and the New Democratic Party, which it became known as. (*Voice emphasis*)

### The LSA runs a candidate against the CCF

As a matter of fact at that time, in any event, we carried off a certain action which we'd never done before – we ran a candidate against a CCF candidate. I ran in one of the elections in order to polarize, and present a socialist alternative. We took advantage of that and opened up the idea that the CCF is not sacred, but only a vehicle, and we opened up the idea that we would run a candidate and raise the socialist level, the socialist ideology, in the new milieu of the unification with the AFL/TLC unions. So we ran a candidate – I think it was me.

I think we ran against – you would know him – he's now a York University professor – he wrote a book, he was gay, a leading activist in the Gay movement for a period. At any rate, we approached him, to step down in this seat – (*Toronto riding of*) Broadview if I'm not mistaken – we approached him to step down and let us, as socialists, to put forward a socialist viewpoint, as against the old CCF thing that was washed out, you see. He wouldn't step down, so we ran against him, and I forget what kind of

poll we got, but it was the first time – and it was used against us subsequently, that we had actually run against a CCFer – we **did** run against a CCFer, under these unique circumstances when a re-alignment was taking place in Canadian politics – that justified it, in my opinion, and I would defend it to this day. *(Voice emphasis)*

*WR: Did you have a lot of debates with old CCFers who wanted to move into the new party?*

Yes, I think that Rod Young, who had long been a left-winger in B.C. opposed the New Party – he opposed it and there were quite a few people in B.C., where there was a left wing, a socialist left wing of some substance had been formed over the years around a well-known, socialist, a Marxist CCFer – old man Winch, not Harold, his father – Ernest Winch, a superior person to Harold – his son was already an opportunist in decline. But old man Winch was a Marxist and he defended himself as a Marxist and justified Marxism – and became a pole of socialist consciousness in the BC section of the CCF.

Some of those opposed it – I think it was even more prominent in Saskatchewan – again I can't recollect it – I'd have to do some research – but ultimately they were won over, you know, or they dropped away. But the overwhelming bulk of the Canadian labor movement and radicals in Canada supported the New Democratic Party.

### **Newly elected leader T.C. Douglas blackmails the NDP founding convention**

I went down to the NDP founding convention, because we considered that important – we considered it as opening up a whole new avenue for the radicalization – a new base of operations, and of course when you launch a new party, all your views are up for debate and discussion, so we thought we would be able to participate effectively, on a fraternal basis, in this debate – out of which the New Democratic Party came (*into being*). Well, it was so – an inspiring convention – I will never forget it – and what helped me not forget it was that I wrote it up, in great detail. We turned over that issue of our paper, I think it was called *Labor Challenge* (actually, *Workers' Vanguard* – ed.) – turned it over to the details of the convention – I wrote up the bulk of the material, very detailed.

I moved among the Left in the convention, and there was a Left in the convention, strange to say who they were – Howard Pawley, subsequently premier of Manitoba – he was a young man – quite a bit younger then – he was radical, he identified himself with the Left at that convention, and strange to say, Hazen Argue did. Hazen Argue became the exponent of the Left, although subsequently he broke to the Liberal party and went down the drain – not quite, they had to push him down a little bit further, I guess – but he went down the drain as a factor in the party and the working-class movement in Canada. But he expressed the Left position at the convention – (*there were*) some dramatic episodes at that convention that should never be forgotten – even though they involved Douglas.

(*Tommy*) Douglas was groomed by the leadership, by the Coldwell leadership, to be the new leader of the New Party. And he rose to this challenge, but the big debate at that time – strange to say – was the question of Canada's position in the war drive – NATO and NORAD first came (up) on that occasion, I think it was the first time it came on the floor, and at the same time, Cuba entered into the arena of history. Cuba was an inspiration to left-wingers. There was some trade unionists that came into the convention fresh from the airport – they'd been to Cuba, and they were inspired by what was happening in Cuba, and they brought material with them and they were anxious to speak, and they addressed the convention, to the acclaim of all the delegates. Cuba was an inspiration to everybody at that moment. And – I forget – Lebourdé I think his name was, one of the leaders of the BC left – he had been a trade union delegate to Cuba – I forget the names of the other persons – I could find it easily as we

documented it in detail. Cuba was an inspiration, and then the war threat was another challenge.

At that convention – the convention passed a resolution condemning Canada's participation in NATO and NORAD, if I'm not mistaken – very clearly, that was. Do you recall that? Yes? Yes, so at any rate, Douglas was acclaimed leader – he was the leader of the party, and he challenged the delegates that he would never be leader – he was elected after the resolutions were passed on this – so he came to the fore, to the head of the convention assembly, and said that he would resign if they passed those motions opposed to NATO and NORAD. He laid his resignation on the table. Astonishing – I've never heard of such a thing – the crudest type of blackmail – a man who claims to be a great idealist – a moral ideologue, etc., etc. – he did this. He shocked everybody.

But, nonetheless, he got away with it. So he won the leadership, and he condemned the party policy at that time. So the party could have started off with a very firm commitment against the arms drive and the militarization of Canada – its participation in the Cold War in the fullest sense of the word – but Douglas stopped it, blocked – but of course he couldn't block it indefinitely – but that was the highlight of the convention, in my memory – that episode involving Douglas.

*WR: What was the effect on the convention?*

Oh, everybody was just stunned, you know. But nobody challenged him. I would have yelled if I had been a delegate “resign then, that's fine with us, let the other person (*take over*).” I think we'd just elected him – yes, he'd just been elected.

*WR: (inaudible comment about challenges to Douglas)*

Yes, that's true. I believe Argue did. Probably not dynamically and in a way that we would have anticipated a real opposition would, but he was the opposition – there was a big debate in our movement whether we should support Argue – well we had to support Argue, no matter what you could say about his past. He has taken key positions, correct views on the challenges before the party, so we will support him. And I met (*Douglas*) Fisher at that time, who was an MLA at that time, yes, from Fort William (*now Thunder Bay –ed.*) – he's now a newspaper correspondent

## **Early attempts to build a left wing at the founding convention**

*WR: He was around the NDP*

Yes – he was quite fraternal. He had tried to build a left wing, and he was prepared to identify himself with it – the convention was a confusion – everybody wanted to get the convention onto the road, and take on the Liberals and Tories – that was the atmosphere in the convention, and Douglas's action was like a cold douche, shocking – but people didn't see any alternative, and they didn't want a crisis or a scandal – so it was covered over – I remember later, all kinds of people wrote in for copies of that paper – because we were the only press, the only source of authentic information on the convention, and that issue of the paper had a tremendous circulation to left-wingers and critically-minded persons.\* But the main thing was, of course, we've got to get this Party on the road – we've got to take on the Liberals and Tories – and Douglas knew that of course – he blackmailed it  
(\*See *W12 – Dowson in Workers Vanguard, 1961 – July, August, September & October issues –ed.*)

*WR: Do you remember any more about the conduct of Argue at the convention?*

I do not recall. He didn't play (*a role –ed.*) – he was not a powerful figure, you know. I guess you would have to say he was already having doubts about his future course, because very shortly he walked over to the Liberals – he crossed the House, which again shocked – it was supposed to compromise us – we

didn't feel compromised, we didn't support him as an individual, we supported him because of the positions he had taken, as an alternative to the pro-NATO forces.

*WR: Can you tell me about your relations with persons like Doug Fisher or Rodney Young or Howard Pawley?*

Well, they were polite. I had several talks with Pawley, and Rodney Young – he's gone already, isn't he? I don't think he was ever in the NDP – no I don't think so. They settled accounts with him – see, these developments took place over a series of years – various people tried to stop the process of moving to the right – you have to say that it's true that the New Democratic Party was founded in the process of right-wing compromises to win the AFL/TLC brass, and the rank-and-file, or course who were just moving to the left – nobody wanted to jeopardize that left motion – and so these people got expelled, brutally, you know – I imagine the right wing leadership could present them as persons who were impinging on the future development of the party as a mass party – it wasn't a favorable situation you know, to stand up (*against the leadership –Ed.*)

But I think Young would have already left – they had carried a big campaign against Rodney Young. He was of course accused of being a Trotskyist. I would say within the framework of the debates in the CCF at that time, that was essentially a correct characterization. He was sympathetic – we worked with him – he was never a member of our movement to my knowledge – he was with the “White Lunch Gang” – a bunch of radicals who had come together in the White Lunch (*restaurants*) like the Honey Dew restaurants – it was a hangout during the Depression, during the post-War depression, and he became known and respected and got elected as an MP.

### **A revolutionary unionist elected to Parliament from B.C.**

There was another fellow by the name of Harry Archibald – I think you may have heard of him – No? Well there was a chap – they came out of a group of post-war opposition(*ists*) that developed in Prince Rupert (*northwest BC*). We had a comrade by the name of Paddy Stanton who was a longstanding Trotskyist. He went up to Prince Rupert as a welder and he became head of the union up there – the Boilermaker's Union at a big shipyard in Prince Rupert – one of the places really developed during the War.

He made contacts, he build a caucus in the union there – a radical caucus – of course the Boilermakers were not a radical union relative to some other unions, because they were basic industrial workers – tough, hard work – nonetheless, they were not one of the radical unions, co-called.

He (*Stanton*) built a group in that union, and he recruited a guy, and set up a boxing club with a young fellow who was a bit of a boxer – and he helped in the recreation program – because there's nothing to do in Prince Rupert, a small port, you know. So Paddy recruited another guy who was an Air Force man, who was still in the Air Force when Paddy recruited him to the Trotskyist movement through his activities up there – and his name was Rodney Young – a young Air Force man.

*WR: Not Harry Archibald?*

Harry Archibald – pardon me, sorry, I hope (*you can*) straighten up that there – it was Harry Archibald that Paddy recruited to the Trotskyist movement. He came to our movement because we were Trotskyists, but he was a member of the CCF and he got the nomination for the CCF in Prince Rupert, because Stanton and others were key, active people, and Trotsky-baiting wouldn't go anywhere out there you see. People were recognized as a legitimate part of the CCF – so Archibald got a nomination and took a seat in the House – federally, yes he was an MP. He was a fine man, in many ways, you'd have to say, because he came to us after he got the nomination and got elected!

He wanted to know what he should do in the House of Commons. Here we were, a small revolutionary socialist group with a person who is a member of the House of Commons in Canada, at the time of the Cold War, and who had a vehicle to speak up and say what he had to say. So we immediately contacted the American comrades and suggested if they could send someone up to Ottawa – we had to take advantage of this situation. We had to help this person articulate (...)

### **The revolutionary elected to Parliament founders for lack of a base**

*WR: I'd like to start this off (on the opportunity presented to the movement by the election of a left-wing CCF-MP from Northwest B.C.) – he came down to you for help, then you asked the SWP (our American co-thinkers in New York –Ed.) to...*

To send somebody up – they (*the SWP in New York -ed.*) were an expanding group, they had more resources than we had, we were going to collaborate with them – but here we were, faced with an opportunity to have a spokesperson in Ottawa – in a critical period in world history. And (*as a newly elected CCF-MP from Prince Rupert BC*) Archibald wanted to do what we thought he should do – he came to us completely openly. But unfortunately we had hardly known him – he had no connection with us, and the leadership of the CCF moved in on him like a ton of bricks.

(*CCF leader*) Coldwell even went along with the baiting of him – he got known in the House – if you look up in *Hansard* you'll find that someone says, I think it was one of the leaders of the bourgeois parties, probably the leader of the Liberal Party, he talked about how we have in this House 'a man who speaks like a Trotskyite' – that's the term they used – it got big publicity in the press, and the CCF wasn't prepared to defend that, you know – they took their distance right away, so he became completely isolated before we could even get to move – I think he made one very effective speech, and then they isolated him, laid the law down to him.

He was by himself, and there was no movement of substance behind this fellow Harry Archibald, so he went into limbo. I think he got a job – I don't know if he stood, tried to get the nomination in the election, or not. It's quite possible he didn't stand, but he got a job in the fish plant which was a big institution in Prince Rupert. He died not long after that, and even before that he played no role – but that was an interesting experience, that a member of Parliament was a Trotskyist, with his own thoughts, (who) wanted to service Canadian workers with revolutionary ideology.

*WR: Did the SWP ever get up there---*

No, I think George Clarke, a leading cadre in the SWP, came to Toronto, to help us collaborate with him, you know. We knew there was a big problem, you know – what the hell would happen to him – because we didn't have any substantial forces in the CCF, so it didn't go anywhere. A fluke of history. But a large party, a party with real cadre and substance could have taken advantage of that – who knows where an experience like that would go?

*WR: (unintelligible question about a woman radical – her name not heard )*

Yes, she played a big role for a while, and then disappeared. I often wondered what happened to her; I never heard – sometime you can tell me, but she played quite a role in the House for a period – she was elected from Saskatchewan, and she was a farmer's wife, but an articulate person and she made some very powerful speeches in the House of Commons against the War, I think at the time. But Archibald just didn't go anywhere. And we weren't able to back him up – give him substance.

*WR: Was it more open to radical views – BC?*

Oh yeah, there's a real radical tradition in BC – it's not there now – as a matter of fact I was astonished at the convention I think you went to, not many years ago, and reported that there was no BC delegates who were in the left wing, that supported the Left wing – astonishing, that's something new – there was always a core of Left wingers from BC – it was the heart of the Left Wing in NDP-CCF – always had been, with its radical tradition, a powerful union movement, you know. The Stanley Park club – this was a really left club – whenever I went on a tour, I always spoke to the Stanley Park club – the persons who carried the ball in that club were socialists, and principled socialists, and sympathetic to the Trotskyist movement, and they had an effective operation there – it was the longest-standing CCF club in the province – I don't think its anything now, the situation has changed – but it was a radical club.

### **Socialist traditions in BC vs. those of Ontario in the Trotskyist movement**

*WR: Was that a problem for you to try to hold together two very difference kinds of traditions in Toronto and Vancouver?*

Oh there were some problems but we were integrated you know – the development was uneven and the tasks were different – slightly different, not fundamentally, you know – they didn't feel required to take positions that compromised our work in the East – no I don't think there was any substantial problems. It wasn't all peace and harmony in the Trotskyist movement – we were trying to influence the course of development of the broad left in the CCF-NDP – there were differences.

And as I seem to recall the Vancouver comrades, under the pressure of other left-wingers, considered the New Democratic Party questionable. They were not sure that we should support the NDP. We had some discussions with the Vancouver comrades on the importance of this – how the New Democratic Party was a fact – and also the CCF was *not* a fact – and some people thought they could carry a parallel – as a matter of fact, I think Saskatchewan for a considerable period called itself “CCF” – was it Alberta? *(voice emphasis)*

I know there was some tendency not to have anything to do with this “trade union party” you know – in the CCF there have been many persons who identified trade unions with right-wing reformism, and they considered themselves *socialists*, as against right-wing *reformists*. It was an illusion because they didn't have any influence and possibility of having any impact, and they deteriorated. They were not revolutionary socialists – they were *social-democrats* you might say – the last of the social-democrats. *(voice emphasis)*

### **That “social-democratic” label**

When people these days talk about social-democracy and apply that label to the CCF, as I've said several times, the NDP is not a “social-democratic” party in the classical meaning of the word, it's a labor party. Whether it is correct to do this or not – I don't want to get into that debate – but the NDP is a reformist party based on the unions – we have a “labor party” – and I've insisted it be called a labor party, and not a social-democratic party – because to call it a social-democratic party suggests that its fundamentally a socialist party of some type – but its not a socialist party – it has potentialities for socialists to develop in it – let's see where we are going with this – it's not an unimportant problem...

For instance, just recently, the labor party underwent, in Britain, a couple of splits. In the process, one of the splits that broke from the Labour Party called itself the “social-democratic” party. That clarified the situation I think for some people in Canada – that social-democracy is to the *right* of a labor party – its a reformist party, a reformist current which has no socialist tradition or socialist roots, and has no



dynamism in that direction. At any rate, I've always been of the view that the correct appellation of the New Democratic Party is, that it is a labor party formation – that means that it reflects the empirical, primitive responses of the radicalization into the plane of politics – independent politics, independent of the bourgeois parties, the mainstream of bourgeois politics (*voice emphasis*).

But it's not socialist, and it's incorrect to call it “social-democratic” because that doesn't give any insight to it – what its origins were, and what its dynamics are. It's just a semantic (*question*), you might say. But I think it's correct to call the NDP a labor-party formation, because it's based on the union movement – as a matter of fact, our movement, the Trotskyist movement today in Canada, I think even – well not the ultra-left elements – they consider that the NDP is a labor-party formation – I think even the RWL does now (*the Revolutionary Workers League – post 1974, formerly the LSA after its fusion with the RMG – Ed.*) – it has modified its position.

*WR: Can you tell me more about some of the disagreements you had with the BC people around the formation of the NDP – you went on a tour there once – and the setting up of a public headquarters?* Well these were not prolonged you know – there were differences, different experiences and traditions – for instance, some of the leading comrades of the Trotskyist movement in BC had considerable influence – or thought of themselves as having influence, and roots in the CCF – so there was reluctance to move outside of this – (*to*) an independent (*stance*) – whereas the comrades in the East have always had a semi-independent operation. In BC they didn't have any independent operation – they participated in genuine left currents in BC – but there were no genuine left currents in Ontario – no genuine ones with depth which had old cadre.

In BC there was such a thing as a socialist current – longstanding in BC – and our comrades were inhibited in jeopardizing their relations with them, because the right-wing leadership of the NDP of course was extremely hostile – vigorously hostile – to socialists. And there was a series of experiences, like Rodney Young's experience, Archibald's experience, and even Winch's experience when Harold Winch went very rapidly to the right – there were a series of instances where the left wing was harassed in BC – it survived for a period but it didn't survive in any genuine genial atmosphere.

But there was no left current in Ontario of any substance – there were elements, but there was less and less as time went on – for instance I even see it now taking place in Ontario. I've been active in the NDP for some years now – I've always retained a membership in the NDP, and I've been *active* in it. I go to all the meetings in the riding here – the annual meetings are always interesting in Rosedale-St. George (*riding*) which I live in – because there's a bunch of people who come you never see other than at the annual meeting, (*where*) they keep in touch with the party – they always come over to me – they know who I am – they always identify with me – but they play no role in the party – the remnants of old radicals, quite a substantial number of them, but they are now disappearing – they're all older, they're my generation, and they're disappearing – attrition is taking place – but they are mementoes of the past, and the socialist past of the party – elements of them, less and less. But that happens at every annual meeting of St. George – at every meeting where I would of course put forth some views of a general left character, judiciously, and they always got a bounce! Some persons would come over – “how are you” and so forth – so they vote for the resolution, etc. I don't see them any more now – I've outlived them all (*chuckle*).

*(Break in recording, then recording very faint)* ...on activists in the union movement, for instance – Fred Callaghan, who is leading a strike right now – a long-standing unionist in our movement. But important forces developed in the union movement, who came to the Trotskyist movement-- for instance, Murray Dowson himself... (*recording volume drops*).

## NOTES

*\*See the extensive literature of the LSA debate on Canadian nationalist sentiment in website folder W2*

## REFERENCES

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## PHOTOS

1963 Leader of newly formed NDP Douglas reveals his party's class bias on strike picket line

## Part 8 The SEL/SIC becomes the League for Socialist Action/Young Socialists

*WR: What was the position of women in the Trotskyist movement before the women's radicalization?*

Well we always had some women in the movement, you know. We didn't suddenly discover women's subjugation, the prejudice against women – we didn't discover it – very early we were part of it, really early – women in the movement were pioneers of women's liberation. We had prominent women comrades playing roles – I won't say any of them were big leaders, but they were prominent.

*WR: Who were they?*

Well, I am trying to think of some of their names. Well one of the leading comrades was Sylvia Johnstone – she was a very able person. Sadie Gerrard, another prominent figure, I don't know if you know them – they are a little before (*this period*) – I don't know how far they survived or moved into the new wave of women's liberation – we recruited new persons, though – Sadie Gerrard, she was an activist in York Memorial Collegiate with Murray and Ross Dowson and Gordon Brooks and a few others – we had a Spartacist Youth League on the York Memorial campus – Sadie was a very able person, a sophisticated person, and so was Sylvia Johnstone. If you read “*Down the long table*” (*specious fiction based on the movement of the 1930s – Ed.*)– (Earle) Birney describes the Johnstone household in York Township – that was her parents, mother and father, and she was quite a good type – for a period a girlfriend of Maurice Spector. These people were quite sophisticated politicals. There were others whose names I have forgotten.

### The movement welcomes the advent of “Women's Lib”

We always attracted women; I would say you would have a hard case to prove male chauvinism with regards to the Canadian Trotskyist movement – as a matter of fact, Spector's girlfriend – who was a very sophisticated person, a radical, she was a social worker, I forget her name. Jack Macdonald's wife, Beth Macdonald, was a leading activist in the Workers Party, with Macdonald – so, you know, the CP itself did, at certain times, have prominent women like Florence Custance – now, she was a leader in the CP – she broke from the CP around the period of the Trotsky-Stalin debate – I don't think I've ever seen a real biography of her – it would be very good if some young woman wrote up a biography of her; she was a very prominent woman in the radicalization. I've made some notes on her – Beckie –

*WR: How did the (early) party talk about women – did the Trotskyist movement ever move in a comprehensive way or talk about traditional Marxist (attitudes) towards women?*

I don't know about the theoretical aspects of it – we never thought of women as housewives – they were women, many of them workers – you know, women entered the workforce on a big scale – they were *in* the workforce on a big scale when the liberation movement operation developed – we're not talking about the profound unevenness of the development of the radicalization as regards women, but the influx of women during the 60s and into the radicalization – it was quite profound, and it wasn't just on the women's question, it was on Vietnam – there were popular struggles developing – where are we going? (*voice emphasis*).

*WR: in the 60s, women's issues were starting to come to the fore; there was a Royal Commission – do you remember anything about that at that time?*

A government royal commission, yes – I remember very well – that Commission evoked a big interest among the women in our movement – as small as it was – a big interest – we had some sophisticated women who followed these developments and very quickly identified themselves with the overall struggle for women's rights. And we struck off (*a committee*) and prepared a brief – it was one of the first public actions we ever took – we prepared a brief with a wave of discussions in the leading cadre

of the small movement of ours and we struck off a committee to prepare a brief. It was unfortunate for such a challenge for some of our movement that we weren't able to reconcile some of the differences – I can't remember what they were – I'd have to think about them – but I ended up writing the brief and polishing it – unfortunately we didn't have a woman who could respond to this, but they came onto the committee, and there were very hot discussions, and I don't know if I mollified the tendencies of that time – I'd have to look back on some of the correspondence... (See Dowson archives W3--*Women's Liberation*, listing the subsequent 1972-73 documents disputes on abortion struggle and the later BC women's ministry question –Ed.)

WR: *What were the differences?*

Well that's what I'm trying to think – what the hell were they; I unfortunately cannot tell you at this time, but I'm sure they're documented in the correspondence. Jackie Henderson was on the commission (as was) Joan Newbigging and who else? I was on; you see we had a modest cadre and as poor as I was, I was the best we had, and they tried to make use of me, you know – there was a very convivial attitude, no concept that a women's brief was a woman's task alone and men shouldn't have anything to do with it; although we wanted that the women could carry the whole ball – I think some of our comrades were not experienced enough and I tried to bring what I knew of this problem, of general Marxist theory, but we presented this the brief and it had quite an impact in the women's movement...

We put it out in a very nice pamphlet to make it available to everybody who wanted to know about it – and it had a very big impact – and we circulated it far and wide, and I think we had the most effective presentation – that was the first public activity of our small group in the growing radicalization as it was taking place, not as we would have wanted it – and we didn't pontificate, we made a serious brief contribution, and tried to formulate the demands for the struggle on the basis of our experience – and this was before the movement really took off, right in the initial stages of it, so our contribution was a pioneering action. (See W3-1968: “*Status of Women/Statute de la Femme: brief submitted to the Royal Commission.*” )

When I look back I must say it must have been quite effective because it carried us for quite a while, and of course the women who helped put this out brought other women around, and I remembered very distinctly big debates in the (LSA –Ed.) Branch – I was a member of the Toronto Branch of course – I was more involved in the problems of the movement as a whole, but everybody had to be a member of a working branch, and I can remember the debates (if not) the essence of them. I remember there were hectic discussions around whether (the monthly newsletter) *Velvet Fist* should be published; and whether that was a good name for a women's liberation journal – and there were big disputes in the movement – I would have to say now – I have not familiarized myself with that material and I can't tell you what they were.

But we launched off, and we had a big impact in the women's movement, and some of these people are still around even if we didn't carry them through the more extended period of the history of the movement, they're still around. I could name them, I think, but I'm not sure I want to do that – they were persons who came to our movement. Of course, Pat Schulz, who is well known now for her role in the women's movement – she played a key role. There was a film made (about) her just recently, it should be released shortly; she played a very important role – she was a leading element in the Toronto Branch.

### **The sacrifices of Dr. Henry Morgentaler in winning legal abortion rights**

(...) the process of it, eh? I was again, part of it, but I wasn't conscious of its evolution – I remember

very early we organized mass meetings for Dr. Morgentaler – this was probably through a doctor we had, who agreed with Morgentaler and made contact with him, and we popularized – at that time the French intellectuals around Simon de Beauvoir and others were declaring that they had an abortion – this was how the protest took place – it was illegal to get an abortion in France, and these women, who were very prominent radicals declared they'd had an abortion, therefore they were subject to prosecution by the French courts – well, this became an issue of concern – we started to identify with that, on the question of abortion.

And then women in Canada started to declare that they'd had an abortion, which was illegal also, and this was shocking to the ordinary, run-of-the-mill, proper radicals, you know, that they'd defied the law, and were prepared to say publicly that they'd done so, on such an intimate and personal matter – so it took considerable courage. And that started to take place in Canada, and quite a while ago, you know, and carried up until quite recent times. I seem to recall – again I can't place the date on it – I can recall my sister being part of a group of women who'd declared they'd had an abortion, publicly – and this was part of the Morgentaler campaign – part of the campaign for clinics, free-standing clinics. This was Joyce Rosenthal – she had several abortions, and she was inspired by the protests to establish a right to abortion, and Morgentaler being an important factor – I remember writing a personal letter to Morgentaler, in solidarity, because I got to know him – not intimately you know.

*WR: What was he (Dr. Morgentaler) like in this period?*

He was a militant man, a courageous man, an inspiration to the whole movement – women are completely in debt to him – (*Ross's voice wavers –Ed.*) I'd say he was one of the greatest figures – (*RD breaks up a little*) – pardon me, I don't know why I am so – ridiculous, soft, eh? (*RD sobs, sniffs*) Morgentaler came on the scene early – I think he played a leading role – wasn't just a figure that attached on to it – he played an initiating role, he gave directions. As a matter of fact, Morgentaler still is a leader of the women's movement in my opinion. I never read a statement by him that I haven't been impressed by its profundity – the tactical moves he made – he's an astute politician that's capable of mobilizing women (*RD's voice wavers*) I think he's quite unique – I don't know of anybody (*voice wavers*) in the States or anywhere else (*who matched his contribution*). So, where are we going? (I think we should get off this, I'm a little upset). (*See Eleanor Wright Pelrine: Morgentaler – “The Doctor who couldn't turn away,” Signet – 1976*)

*WR: Do you recall the New Left – Do you feel that was this where people were radicalizing around –?* Well, they were part of it, concerned by the Old Left – the part of Old Left that was static, and ossified, and they don't recognize the radicalization when they see it, or they have some concept of priorities. I think I said earlier – the Communist Party didn't know how to meet this challenge – they were caught with the idea of the “proletariat,” that the toilers are going to do (*it all*) – a caricature of the revolutionary struggle – it has some relevancy, of course, but its mechanical – and it cut them off from the dynamics of the process.

It's hard to believe that persons who identified with the Gay struggle within the CP were expelled. So the CP turned out to be in essence conservative, just as they did in the challenges of the revolution in Russia – became the bureaucracy – its instrument – and the Communist Parties of the world became, as Trotsky said, the border guards of the Soviet bureaucracy – which is a very conservative stratification who live on the gains of the October Revolution but really isn't part of it – who is opposed to it, really opposed to its development. So its consistent that its supporters in Canada would be conservative – this is the bureaucracy – their mentors are conservative. So the CP didn't respond to these challenges, although it had to inevitably since people around the CP think of themselves as revolutionaries – think as many of them do – this causes problems for the brass in the CP and they had to adjust to it...

So they identified with women's liberation but they weren't part of it in the early days – they attached onto it, just as they did with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee – their record in Cuba was against the Revolution, but they adjusted to it, the pressure is on them – they're part of the working class movement you know, willy-nilly, no matter how conservative and even reactionary they are – they are part of the working-class movement – they so they had to adjust to it, to catch up with reality. But they weren't there – but we were – and I guess the reason we were was because Trotskyism is profoundly revolutionary and these are revolutionary challenges...

### **The expansion of the Canadian and US labor movements in the 1960s**

But of course during the War, the Canadian labor movement expanded radically – during the period of peacetime collaboration, of course, that expedited it – it was a union movement nonetheless, being on the scene of battle in the shops, etc., of course it became a very radical source.

So, our comrades went up with the union movement – you'd have to say there was no real, substantial, rooted labor movement until the War in this country. It's been long my view – I'm not able to give you the data and the figures but I'm sure it shows up in the labor organizations' stats, that the War was the foundation of the mass labor movement as we now know it – which is one of the most powerful labor movements in the world. The percentage of workers that are organized in Canada is extremely high – qualitatively higher than in the United States – I'm not just talking about recent years, it it has been for many many years.

I don't know if you know any relative figures in regards to Britain and other countries, but the labor movement has been very strong in Canada. Of course we have gone along with it, we've been part of it – but we haven't been leaders in some great strike, like many (*SWP leaders recruited from –Ed.*) Minneapolis, where the American comrades were involved in the pioneer strikes of the CIO. Leading comrades were in the Autolite strike, in Youngstown, Ohio...

*WR: What was the difference between the American movement (inaudible) – and the Canadian, which lacked real contacts in the labor movement?*

I think its a fluke of history. Cannon was part of it. Cannon was head of the American Labor Defence League – he made a lot of contacts when he was a leader of the Communist Party, with labor activists. William Z. Foster put a good base and directed the CP into the union movement – although I don't think the Communist movement was qualitatively different in its labor base (*in the American movement ...*)

You have to talk about Jack Macdonald, head of the... (*inaudible – the then Canadian Labour party – Ed.*) – he was the founder of the CP and founder of the Trotskyist movement, along with Spector, you know. (*Among*) the persons I knew when I first came around was Jock Marshall, who was a boot and shoe workers' organizer, head of the union in Canada – he was a member of the Trotskyist movement – so there were quite a few of them (...) but we didn't have any big, heroic figures such as developed around Farrell Dobbs and the Dunn Brothers (*subsequently leaders of the US-SWP –ed.*) and around (*their*) historic episodes – for instance, we had nothing in the leadership of the Ford auto strike – and the barricade struggle – nothing in the Steelworkers' struggle – no comrades of substance – until we come to Jean-Marie Bédard in the later stage, you know.

But we always picked up, we had unionists, and an active core of the party were unionists – its only under the recent evolution of the Revolutionary Workers League (*the transformation of the LSA in the post 1974 split period – Ed.*) that the idea of a proletarian orientation, or an implantation in shops, was

current – (*while*) it was just automatic in the movement – I'm sort of laughing when I read these articles that appear in the RWL press about the **workers** that we're recruiting – it wouldn't have been in our mind to demark workers being recruited, or anybody else being recruited – we (*just*) recruited workers – that's who we recruited in the earlier days – there were no student radicals around (*voice emphasis*).

But when the student radicalization took place, we recruited student radicals, without prejudice. The CP, if I'm not mistaken, could be said to have failed to respond to the rise of the women's movement, and didn't recruit women in the early days of the women's radicalization, whereas the League for Socialist Action did – we were central and moved in on the women's radicalization – we were in the first fights in policy – we put out a paper which was addressed to women – *The Velvet Fist* I think it was called. I remember the big debates in the early days of women's radicalization – we were right in it – so likewise in the union (*struggles*) – we were right in it. We were part of it. I think that was a reflection of our orientation in general.

We never were a petit-bourgeois movement – I don't even need to qualify (*that*).

### **The LSA's role in the Toronto Teamsters Local 938 strike**

*WR: Can you give me some sense (inaudible) – of our participation in the Toronto Teamsters strike of 1962?*

Well one of the most impressive was the “Forward With Democracy” or “Four Wheel Drive” – that thing was a caucus and a paper in the Teamsters' local here in Toronto. Again, I don't have it at my fingertips – I can't tell you what the local number was – 544 I think. (*actually 938 – Local 544 was brother Hugh's aerospace local, a much more difficult area fighting entrenched Stalin influence –Ed.*)

This local was a big Teamsters' local in the Toronto area, in which a fellow by the name of Harry Paine (*a veteran member of the Canadian Trotskyist movement – Ed.*) became a member of the union, and he started to play a good role – of course the Teamsters was one of the most corrupt unions and it is embarrassing to the Canadian union movement to have a bureaucratic operation such as the Teamsters (*affiliated to it*) – He (*Harry*) found a popular response among the rank-and-file – I don't know what rank-and-file movement there is in the Teamsters in the States, but in Canada there were rank-and-file dissidents – there's a local in Vancouver that plays a radical role in the national American conventions of the Teamsters – a small group of them, but I would say that in all of these A.F. of L. unions there are a considerable scattering of dissidents who are against the American trade union brass – all the more because they don't have any autonomous rights, and many of the locals are put under trusteeship when there's a dispute.

*WR: Did that happen when Harry Paine was active ?*

Oh yes, their local was under trusteeship, off and on, all the time. At any rate Harry Paine went into that shop – and he's a vocal person, and he started to put forward demands around the question of democracy, you know, in the union – and they set up a caucus called “FWD – Four Wheel Drive – Forward with Democracy.” They published a very effective union paper which was circulated broader than their local in the Teamsters – but they had a real caucus there. I'm not sure I can take it through its evolution, because its over a period of years and I can't tell you exactly what substantially came out of it – you know, a lot of actions you launch don't appear to go anywhere, or they stay caught in a local, and even though you try to take it outside the local.

I'm not sure what the balance sheet can honestly be said on that work, but we did a lot of work in that local, and in the Teamsters, and Paine and other workers recruited a caucus. We built a caucus, a broad

caucus on Teamsters' issues and we brought a substantial core – at one time I would say we had eight or nine members in the Toronto Branch who were activists in that caucus –Four Wheel Drive, Forward With Democracy – and they helped put out that paper. I helped them put it out – it was an important experience for the Canadian Trotskyist movement. *(See details at W15a-#4-Teamsters 938-1960-1963 including documents of a months-long strike which Ross with Joe Hendsbee and our movement essentially led – Ed.)*

### **Camp Poundmaker the educational/recreational lodge and campsite**

(...) Money for the camp *(Camp Poundmaker was allocated by the movement –Ed.)* We got the land *(donated by one of the Teamsters – northwest of Belleville on the Salmon River)*. We came across some very good types. One guy in that local was a farmer – had been a farmer – and what he did to make extra money, because you couldn't make very good money as a Teamster – he took under contract heifers, you know, he fattened them up on this land he had up near Napanee. When he came into the movement, and became very identified with us. *(He was)* concerned about the development of the youthful elements in the movement, and we started talking about a camp, and he decided to give us the area on which we could build a camp.

He owned about 26 acres out near Napanee, and he gave it to us – gratis – and we set up a camp – having got the land. We mobilized the forces to buy some second-hand lumber and build a big *(lodge)* headquarters – we put a fireplace in it, and it became a central area of activity – we set up a school, a version of the Trotsky School that the Americans comrades had set up in the Pokanoe Hills *(in upper New Jersey State –Ed.)* we held conventions out there, we held classes out there, weekends, celebrations, it became quite a viable scene – when the movement was united, and more youthful, the camp was a big phenomenon for us – of course we're getting old now, and the cold weather affects us.

### **The progressive nature of the rising Canadian nationalist sentiment** *(See W2-Canadian national question 1925-1978 including a dozen major debate documents 1972-74 –Ed.)*

*WR: Were you nationalistic, or was the movement nationalistic in the 1960s?*

Some people would say that we were – and they would say that I am – they would say I was a nationalist – and I would not for a moment dispute the concern and the involvement of the key cadre of our movement with the nationalist developments that took place – in protests against the American takeover of the Canadian economy – in my opinion this takeover was being completed by the so-called “free trade” that's now before the people of Canada – you know, the Mulroney government has now decided to call an election very shortly, and the major issues they're going to put forward is “Are you in favor of free trade with the United States?” There's an opposition to free trade – is it nationalist opposition? It's got elements of nationalism – but its not chauvinism, its not social-patriotic nationalism – there's a new nationalism which I think Marxists have to take into account – and this became an issue in the life of the League for Socialist Action.

*WR: in the 1960s or only in the 1970s (--tape sound level drops to near zero)*

Oh yes, of course... Well some people put the date on Expo ('67) – because Expo became a great festival, for Canadianism, and I imagine that any person who thought much about Canada as a separate identity with a culture and a tradition – a historic experience – never thought about it until the bourgeoisie decided to have this big commercial extravaganza – the Centennial, wasn't it? The Centennial.

So various persons on the Left started to respond to the identity of broad layers of the population –



particular in the youth, with Canadian rights, Canadian autonomy – which had been *(an issue)* in the union movement for many years, of course. The CAW, autoworkers *(represents)* a struggle for self-control – the CAW split off from the American autoworkers – in my opinion this was a struggle for Canadian trade union rights, for Canadian autonomy – that we should govern ourselves and not be subject to the American trade union bureaucracy – its fundamental character is not that it is American, but its a trade union bureaucracy – but they have dominated the Canadian locals – and the split led by *(Bob)* White is a reflection of this – but this has been *(an issue)* in the Canadian movement a long time.

There are not many countries that have no national trade union centres. The Canadian labor movement for many years *(broken recording interrupts)* ...understood the need for separate *(unions)* – which could carry on fraternal relations and fraternal actions with the American trade unions – they never had any concept that we really should be a local *(broken recording interrupts)* ...its only about what – ten years ago – that the Canadian labor movement , the unified Canadian labor movement – composed of the old CIO and old AF of L unions came out with guidelines for (...) we were ready and willing to go along with that – I don't know if we agitated for it – on various occasions – we must have identified ourselves with it because you see its not a strange or novel concept – *(malfunctioning recording)* – our role in the Canadian labor movement – I don't know when we first starting thinking in these terms,\* but I think that for some while now we have identified with *(very low and broken recording)* discussions in 1968 or 67 – when you think of Quebec... *(See special issue on the Canadian Centennial in Young Socialist: W17, #5: Young Socialist Forum 1967 --Ed.)*

*(\*the initial discussion of the 1960s on growing Canadian nationalist sentiment was in 1968 with the publication of a LSA pamphlet entitled "Canada-US Relations," after adoption of a convention document by Ross Dowson on this subject, with a caveat that the new youth comrades could not be held responsible for a history of the movement on this question which they had not experienced. See W2 on the Dowson archives, 1968, also related articles in another 1969 pamphlet of the same name – Ed.)*

#### *PHOTOS AT W18-RDA*

- 1962-2 LSA militant Harry Paine a leader in Teamster strike picket line which closed down the Toronto trucking industry for a month
- c.1970-4 Lois Bedard and Anne Dowson on OPEIU working women's picket
- 1972-1 LSA mayoralty candidate Jacquie Henderson participating in media debate
- 1975-1 Women's Day march, May: Toronto Amnesty for Dr. Morgentaler
- c.1987-3 An array of feminist buttons from the Lois Bedard activist archive

## Part 9 The LSA's early intervention in the anti-Vietnam War movement

*WR: What about the antiwar movement – was Vietnam the key to the radicalization?*

Well, the women's movement was coming along – these movements were starting to intermesh, you know – which is the key one? Certainly the movement that had the broadest appeal was the solidarity movement, the protest against the American intervention against the Vietnamese Revolution. And we were in that from the very initial days, from the very beginning.

I think, at one time, (*when*) our headquarters was on Queen just over from University, the major actions took place at the American Consulate on University Avenue, and our headquarters was at the centre of all the actions against the American State Department – whatever it was doing – on Vietnam, and whatever other radical protests started to form – so we had a lot of credibility. With students – we had started to make connections with the student movement, and they became an important factor – they sort of came together – I've never thought of it in terms of their sequence – they impinged one on another – the women's radicalization started to develop, the anti-war protests started to develop, and we started to recruit young people – they were intermixed you know, they were in one area, then another area, as a whole – they were the things to be done.

### The LSA takes the lead in campaign against Canadian complicity in the Vietnam War

But the question of Canada's complicity, I remember we used the word during a discussion – we used to have discussions on an informal basis on what our work was – people would come into the hall, it became a centre, and the hall at 334 Queen (West) was very centrally located, not far from the campus; so a lot of discussions took on a running form – I remember having an argument with some comrades about what we should call the anti-Vietnam War movement and what its main slogan should be – and I remember coming into acquaintance with the word 'complicity,' and I said 'that's the *exact* word – we were also ready to write headlines for *Labor Challenge*, and when someone said 'complicity' I looked it up in the Thesaurus, and I said “that's the exact word we want to use” (*speech emphasis –ed.*)

'Canada is complicit with the United States' – that (*slogan*) means they're not the initiators, not the up-front persons, but (*we're*) supporting the role of American imperialism, all the way down the line – we are their apologists. So that became the key slogan in the anti-Vietnam War movement – “End Canadian complicity” – it became the slogan of the movement which constructed itself along committee lines, it was an anti-war committee setup which was a united front. (*See our press on the Canadian role as cover for US army atrocities – spokespersons and apologists for the ICC, International Control Commission – Archives W16.*)

But we played a leading role – I think we played *the* leading role – but other persons played leading roles too, it was broader than us – but we were most concerned it (*the movement*) be broad; we were not out to grind our axe; we knew that this was a big movement, bigger than any of its components, and had big responsibilities – because of course the War was horrifying in Vietnam – and there was a rejection of Canadian policy. (*See Web archives on anti-nuclear arms mobilizations in the 1950s, then against the Vietnam War -- W16a (LSA-YS) & W16b (LSO-LJS – 1955-1985) (speech emphasis –ed.)*)

The NDP – I guess it was the NDP by then (*1961 –ed.*) – didn't respond – NDPers did, certain persons prominent in the NDP did, but the leaders of the Party did not. I remember we organized an “On to Ottawa” trek to protest Canadian complicity – there were big mobilizations, not just from Toronto, but one centred in Toronto went to Ottawa – we hired a train, booked a train and sold tickets – that was done several times – we were instrumental in that – others were involved – the Communist Party was

involved, you know – *(it's)* good elements were involved in it – it became a big challenge.

### **Winning the NDP to this cause**

I remember I was arguing with some sectarians about the NDP and I said 'you know, the NDP is going to be won to this cause,' and I had a big argument with this person about the NDP and the importance of understanding what the NDP is – its dynamism. I went to that big demonstration and I was listening to David Lewis (*then NDP leader –ed.*) who addressed this demonstration – David Lewis, Mister CCF-NDP himself, and in person – he made a very profoundly revolutionary identification with the Vietnamese – it was quite startling – I had not a word of criticism of what Lewis said – and I turned to people and said 'there you are, that's the proof of the correctness of our line with regard to the CCF – you dismiss it as a reformist social-democratic movement of no relevancy – this movement is capable of reflecting the most radical concepts – and David Lewis who is the epitome of the right in the CCF, and NDP, made the most radical statements.'

So I remember that very clearly because over the years I got into a hectic struggle with sectarians – revolutionary radicals that are sectarians – that first came to our attention when we got involved in this movement. But that's what happened with the new radicalization – the old radicalization didn't know how to meet it, but the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière did – this was a big experience for me – we had learned how to meet this, to stand by our principles but who knew how to mobilize other people

*WR: (question inaudible) – What about the people called the New Left? Why were you –?*  
*(Why were we) Refused? (Excluded?)*

Well, first, we're revolutionaries, you know. We're looking for revolutionary opportunities, and when the revolution starts to move (*over*) Vietnam – we felt we had a big obligation, it was a matter of concern – Canadians were being recruited to go to Vietnam – Canadians were being mobilized to support American imperialism there, and so we moved against them, and we got a response. So I would say – were we better than the other currents? Well, we were more revolutionary than the other currents, we were more innovative, that's obvious to me – we were more flexible.

*WR: (inaudible) What made us do it?*

What made us do it? Well, I would say the world movement – I get your point now I see what it is – I don't think in these terms too much, you know – what made us do it?

### **The world Trotskyist movement responded to the defence of the Vietnamese Revolution**

Well you know, I must say the (*Fourth*) International, which we were a part of, was a big factor – the world Trotskyist movement responded to these challenges – the American party played a very big role in the anti-Vietnam War movement – of course they were more involved than we were – young Americans were being mowed down. That powerful monument in Washington is very gripping – but we didn't have martyrs – there weren't many Canadians were martyred. We responded as human beings, who knew the American working class – we're not prejudiced against them – we looked on the American working class as part of them – I guess that's the relationship of Canadian workers to American workers – that's why the Free Trade thing has a certain credibility that the Tories are carrying – the American workers are part of the Canadian workers – they have that common concept – and we felt the opposition to the Vietnam War was part of us – that's how we saw it.

*(See "OUT NOW": by SWP-YS member Fred Halstead, a leading participant in the US vast movement*

*of opposition against their imperialist war – 1978, Monad Press available through Pathfinder Press, New York – describing the debates within the American antiwar movement and its achievements in forcing their government to abandon the war following at least two massive mobilizations of over a million persons – students in 1968 on campuses across the country – pages 386-387, and trade unionists among the general population in 1971 – pages 506-507 – Ed.)*

*WR: Do you remember the civil rights movement?*

Yes, *(this movement)* had quite an impact, but not comparable to the anti-Vietnam War movement. It had a big impact, as a matter of fact we played quite a role in that – but there were persons who played just as big a role, an equal role *(in civil rights)*, although not *(so)* many in the anti-war, or in Cuba *(defence)* who played a role equal to ours – but in Canada there was a broad sympathetic feeling for the Black struggle in the States – and this was in the early part of the radicalization – thinking about it, it probably pre-dated the Vietnam struggle.

*WR: (inaudible) ... (Was it) parallel to the civil rights movement in the United States?*

Oh yes, we had the centre of the sit-ins (for) the university campus as far as I could understand, *(and that)* was our headquarters. At that time, we were on Queen, opposite the New City Hall. We had a big hall, a vast hall – it was winter when some of the demonstrations took place – in the depths of winter – it was cold as hell, and young students came from the University of Toronto – we tried to mobilize them and succeeded – and others did, others brought them down and used our headquarters, which became a centre for the mobilizations at the American legation on University *(Avenue)*, a couple of minutes from there, where we stashed our signs – they probably came down and had lunch at our headquarters – I'm not sure of the date – you say it preceded the Vietnamese struggle – it was an (early) beginning struggle *(in the later 1950s – see Workers Vanguard at W12 –ed.)*

*WR: I think it identified America as a bad power in the world – not the centre of freedom and democracy. Do you remember the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA)?*

Not really, but I wasn't on campus and it would be difficult for me to remember those things – I probably was acquainted with them, and got into discussions with comrades about them, so I was constantly consulted, you know – I met the activists – our store was a good bookstore and it was centrally located, so people came down – I can remember getting into hectic arguments with people like Peter Horbatiuk who was in the student movement, along with Danny Goldstick, who was his buddy, who was a leading CPer *(Moscow-oriented Communist Party activist)* – they came down to the store, every once in a while we'd have big debates – I had to stop it because it would drive customers away – but it became a sort of a centre, so we discussed all these matters *(break in the tape)* –

## *PHOTOS*

1966-3	Anti-Vietnam War demonstration gathering at Vancouver City Hall
1967-2	Comrade Gus Tolentino examines US napalm wound on Vietnamese man
1970-3	John Riddell, Tom Kerry SWP (US), Colleen Levis (LSO) and Ross at anti-Vietnam war rally (LSA headquarters in Toronto)
1971-2	Collage of LSA leading activists George Addison, Joan Newbigging, John Steele
1973-1	Youth and antiwar leader Joe Young, who spoke often at rallies in Toronto and Ottawa

## Part 10 The defence of the Cuban Revolution

The Cuban Revolution, too – these all came together. For instance, we played a very important role in defence of the Cuban Revolution – a couple of times you know it looked like the American State Department would launch an attack, a military assault on Cuba – we played an instrumental role in calling alarm to the Canadian working class against this and in carrying demonstrations against the American government in protests, in *(calling for)* solidarity with Cuba – and of course we launched the “Fair Play for Cuba Committee” – our comrades were key – it was broader of course – I don't want to boast that we were “it” – we played an instrumental role in establishing the Fair Play for Cuba Committee – Verne Olson was our comrade, you see.

*WR: Can you go into detail about how the Cuban... (solidarity movement was part of these movements?)*

Sure, it's hard to separate them – I will – they're intermeshed, I must say that because there was an interplay you know – young women came into women's liberation movement, and abortion (*rights*) became a big issue, and we played a role in that – I remember we were instrumental – I think we were instrumental, we played a very good role in it – in convincing Morgentaler to launch the abortion campaign – my impression is that we played a very instrumental role – I'm not trying to say we were the whole thing – he identified himself – for instance I don't remember the Communist Party having impact in it, at all – the CP didn't, for quite a period, respond to these new elements of the radicalization, but we did from the word Go – they were no problem for us, we had no concept that it's the hoary hand of sons of labor who were going to carry the solution to the Canadian working class – we wanted to mobilize all kinds, every kinds, of opposition against capitalism, in defence of the workers, of women, and unions, and colonial people's struggles – we identified with them all – so we became a centre – so which one do you want to go to – I mean, trying building it –

## The LSA's key role in promoting the Cuban Revolution

*WR: (Can you tell me) about Fair Play for Cuba?*

That was a very big effort – for instance I think this was one of the most inspiring actions – the other day I happened to come across some old pamphlets, and there was a pamphlet on the “Cuba Tour” – we organized a tour across the campus – campuses started to become very important to us. I remember I had a debate – this is rather amusing – with a fellow by the name of (*David*) Middleton, who I got to know – he had invited me to speak on Trotskyism at the Rosedale CCF – and he had been a CCF candidate – I'm not sure what the dates are here – at any rate, Middleton used to come down and shoot the breeze with me at the store on Queen Street. We used to have debates, and he was always goading me to be more active than I was – I didn't think I could be more active than I was (chuckle) – but he was never satisfied, and he was very concerned about the fate of the Cuban Revolution.

He (*Middleton*) was retired from the Canadian Army, he had a bit of money, and had gone down to Cuba – he was one of the first persons I met who had been down to Cuba – he took the initiative. I don't know what was in his background that caused him to do that – he'd been a CCF candidate – or NDP, I'm not sure – he went down to Cuba and he came back, quite inspired, and as a delegate to the founding convention of the NDP, went down and came back, very inspired. Well, he was not satisfied with what we were doing – he was retired, on a pension, so he started telling us we should do this, do that – I kept knocking down some of his propositions because I thought they were some kind of fantasy, you know – but then I had to be honest with myself and with him, and he suggested what really became the most important project we launched on the question of Cuba solidarity – he suggested we should launch a tour of students to go to Cuba and play a constructive role in carrying forth the

Revolution in Cuba – practical tasks.

He suggested he would take over some of this if we would provide some of the administration and personnel, and if our comrades would provide ourselves as the nucleus for this project. This project resulted in the Cubans, (who) we approached to make available a cargo plane or transport plane of some kind, that would take a bunch of Canadian students who would have been approved of – we were concerned that we didn't allow dilettantes down the Tour – we wanted serious people – we didn't demand they be cleared and stamped “OK” you know, but we wanted serious people and we set up a committee of prominent persons who were well-known, whose integrity was unchallenged – they set themselves up as a screening committee, trying to prevent adventurers and persons who were not serious about doing anything, from people who were serious – and we sent...

I think there were about forty Canadian students from universities across Canada – three or four from all the major universities – they all went down to Cuba and when they came back we published a pamphlet (*see W19: Canadian Students in Cuba*, July 1964). I did the layout of it, and they wrote what they thought about the various areas of interest, and it worked out to be a very impressive pamphlet – “The Student Tour to Cuba,” and that started the FPCC on a very effective plane, a very broad popular character. It was very interesting that Cuba tour, and it was the beginning of the FPCC, which had considerable recognition from the Cubans in the early days – for instance, the Canadian ambassador, he was extremely sympathetic to us – identified himself with us...

*WR: The ambassador to Canada, or an official?*

No, the Cuban ambassador – his name was Ruz, I think, but he spoke at banquets. We started to organize Fair Play for Cuba banquets – so we took on various projects – including a project to send books down to Cuba.

### **The Fair Play for Cuba Committee sends students to Cuba**

*WR: (inaudible) Can we talk about the 1960s and the CP of Canada*

Well the Communist Party in Cuba didn't play a central role – they were outside of it – they dismissed the Fidelista leadership of the Revolution as petit-bourgeois – they were not members of the CP and the CP didn't support the revolution, the first stages of it – the whole struggle – they didn't support it at all, but we *did*. I remember the Canadian movement – I'm not sure how much *we* played a unique and separate role, separable from the American movement, which very quickly identified itself with the Cuban Revolution – but I think (*we*) even pre-dated that – I'm trying to think of who the hell the respondent was – but I came to the conclusion very early, before I saw anyone else do this – it was not a tribute to me – I was privy to some newspaper articles which appeared in the *Star*, which identified the struggle as a socialist revolution – and obviously that's what it was – and I became convinced that this was a genuine socialist revolution – this was not just some guerrilla struggle, some conjunctural struggle – the Fidelista group, the team from the *Granma* (*the guerrilla invasion fishing boat*) which landed on the shores of Cuba, they came down into Havana and they rallied the Cuban workers to their side. (*speech emphasis*)

*WR: Was that the CCFer Jack Scott's articles?*

No, there was another, before him. The Scott articles came out of the good work of the FPCC – this was before – they were just some bourgeois writer. As a matter of fact one of the first writers who gave insight into the Cuban Revolution was one of the top editors of the *New York Times* – I forget his name, he subsequently wrote books on Cuba – he had quite a good understanding (*perhaps Tad Szuk, author of “A critical portrait of Fidel” --Ed.*) If I look back through *Labor Challenge* (*RD means to say*

Workers Vanguard – *Ed.*) I can tell you a certain date. We published this article – we made comments on it, and very early we came to the conclusion that the socialist revolution was under way there, on the march – and so we made identification with it very very early, and of course we started to adjust ourselves to defend the Cuban Revolution and that's how we came to organize the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, how we came to organize the Student Tour, the book campaign..

Like, we approached some persons who were school teachers and we were able to make some arrangements where the Cubans would supply transport of any books we would gather – we gathered school materials; the Cubans wanted to carry a literacy campaign, you know, when they didn't have any equipment – that came from the Canadian school teachers' movement. They supplied books, pencils, all kinds of stuff and that was transported to Cuba through the auspices of the FPCC in agreement with the Cuban government – so it was a **big** affair, it started to blossom for us, and it had a big impact on the thinking of Canadian workers and different elements – not workers so much – teachers, students.  
*(speech emphasis)*

*WR: Obviously, CCFers were quite excited*

Oh yes, one of the first well-known persons who identified with it was a CCF-MLA in BC – I can't recall his name (*Cedric Cox –ed.*), but some prominent CCFers who identified with the Cuban Revolution, aside from the ones I've already mentioned, who came to the founding convention of the NDP, fresh from a tour – those guys were unionists, but there were subsequent MLAs – Cedric Cox – he was an MLA, and he was a leading activist in the CCF in the Vancouver area, and one of his close contacts was a fellow by the name of Phil Courneyeur (*a BC comrade –ed.*), who became very much involved in the Cuban affair, and he came East and helped us build the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and give it more substance.

It became a broad committee with a lot of support with a lot of money, and we started to hold annual banquets in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. And the ambassador several times addressed the banquets with leaders of the American FPCC (*in attendance*) – we didn't organize it, but they took the name – think we initiated the name, I'm not positive – I'm pretty sure we pre-dated the FPCC in the United States but this was a big area of operations.

*WR: It was amazing how open it was because the Cold War was still unlimited, and the world was brought to the brink of world war*

What's the date of the Cuban Revolution?

*WR: Fifty-nine*

Is it – well, it was there, I can testify to it – the struggles were that had to be overcome – I would say that maybe the Cold War had not as profound an effect as we might have thought – at any rate, it was uneven, if it had a big effect over the radicalization as a whole, there was a whole layer of radicals, particularly students and women, who identified with the Cuban Revolution.

*WR: Was it around the time of the Cuban Revolution that you became aware that it was on the campus that would become a centre of radical thought?* Oh yes, that was part of it – yes.

*WR: Before then, the campus had not been as important an arena for radicalized activity*

Well, what's the date of Vietnam? (*WR: Around '63-'64*) And Cuba is earlier – so I can't separate them, you see; they're very close; they fused into one another – and when the women's movement started up, the whole thing is a total – it's a little artificial to say “this group, and that current, and that phenomenon” – they started to become general, and there was overlap, they supplemented one another – and we picked up persons in every area – it fed into the League and the Young Socialists – for

instance, we built a very effective youth movement around this time – as a matter of fact it was the most effective youth movement – I think – that existed in the Left – while the CCF Youth was always rather frail – they were usually given electoral tasks by the adults, you know – they didn't have much character (on) their own as a youth movement, as the CCYM – but we were in it, you know – and in some areas the Cuban event had a big impact on it – I'm sure Cedric Cox utilized his connections as a CCF leader and an MLA to feed youth into the CCYM – so they're all interlocked – I can't make a big differentiation – maybe I was too close to it, you see.

### **The Stalinist's attempted sabotage of the united front defence of the Cuban Revolution**

*WR: Can you tell me about the internal politics of the FPCC – what other groups? There was ourselves, and what other groups?*

We were, for a whole period – we were not sectarian – we didn't say “I am, we are” – like you go to some meetings now and someone gets up and says “I represent so and so” – we never did that – we were actively involved and we didn't seek credit – we didn't try to establish credentials with what we did, but we moved into the Cuban solidarity genuinely and honestly, and we built a movement around us – we didn't bar anybody – we tried to make it, as much as we could, a broad movement, representative – there was no factionalism – you know you were for the Revolution, that's all, you had to identify with some practical objectives which Committee set itself, and we didn't screen the thing.

You know – in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (*the Canadian brigade fighting against Franco in Spain in the 1930s – Ed.*) it's a well-known fact that the Communist Party set up a screening committee to keep out what they said were RCMP agents, and Trotskyists – we never did anything like that – we'd be out of our minds if we tried to keep CPers out of the FPCC, insofar as we dominated it – we didn't dominate it in that sense – we did the work, we did what was decided to do, and we weren't all grinding at the axe – that you had to be a potential member of the League for Socialist Action or the Young Socialists – we did what was useful.

For instance we set up the headquarters for the PFCC – not far from our headquarters – but that was just accidental – we didn't make it part of ours – we held Forums and opened the doors to who were Fair Play for Cuba persons to speak at our Forums, but we tried to get speakers to speak anywhere and everywhere in the interests of the Cuban Revolution, which we did – Vern Olson played the key role – I don't know that he was identified except by other factional currents – other political currents with a factional attitude – which might be concerned that he was a Trotskyist – Vern Olsen was a Trotskyist, but it wasn't an issue. We never made it an issue.

What happened of course was that the Communist Party started to move into Cuba solidarity work. But the CP was an issue, because the CP of Cuba caused a crisis in Cuba. (*Hanibal*) Escalante was a leader of the CP in Cuba (*which*) was condemned by Fidel, in one of his speeches – I have forgotten many of these things – but there was a big scandal in Cuba over Escalante, and Fidel denounced him – he was a leading CP representative and spokesperson, who went into disfavour – but we never tried to grind the axe against the CP because a person who was called a communist in Cuba was condemned by Fidel. We presented the material, we made available all the basic and important documents that the Cubans gave.

As a matter of fact we set up a circulation outfit, which is rather interesting – we made arrangements – we had a really fine working relationship with the Cuban leadership, and we set up a mailing system which was very costly and inefficient, for (*the weekly militia newspaper*) *Granma* to be mailed from Cuba. So we approached the Cubans – we had a working relationship with the government and Cuban



bodies – and they sent us a bundle, big bundles of *Granma* and we carried a mailing – we took up subscriptions for it – and it was handled by the FPCC. We were part of the core of activists and committed elements of the FPCC but we weren't the total operation, and we were always trying to widen it, so that may have been what you might say, led to our downfall. Because the CP of Canada suddenly started to move into the FPCC and so they started to manipulate it – started to play a factional role in it, and at one time there was a split – yes, they split the FPCC.

Again I don't know what year this was, but I remember the comrades telling me that some persons who had been in the FPCC wanted the executive members of the FPCC to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen – did we have a King then, or a Queen? – I'm not sure at that time – they wanted us to swear an oath of allegiance – this astonished me – why the hell would they do this? They were capitulating to the red-baiting – we told them to go to hell. They split the committee – this was through the auspices of a man who passed himself off as a great Christian – a reverend Morgan, the head of the Unitarian Church, who did some good things, but he split the FPCC on behalf of the Stalinists.

*WR: He Trotsky-baited?*

Yes, that's what he used.

*WR: Was the pressure on the FPCC to take the oath of allegiance?*

Well the FPCC cadre wouldn't take the oath of allegiance – we said it's a scandal you're doing this, you're just red-baiting, you're doing what the right-wingers want to do – we refused to be part of it. So they set up their own Fair Play for Cuba Committee – so they split, it's very interesting.

*WR: Did it survive?*

Yes, it was able to survive, but some developments took place in Cuba, too, and gradually the CP started to play an important role in Cuba, and Fidel was influenced by them, I've never seen this really documented, we should do it sometime, but the FPCC's relations started to become not so rosy with the Cubans, and a certain hostility developed on the part of elements in Cuba. Now I'd have to speak to some of the leading comrades to know how this evolved. But eventually the FPCC's relations were no longer amicable, no longer harmonious, and the committee started to suffer accordingly.

Now how this came finally to take place, I'm not sure, but the FPCC was split by the CP – they initiated the split and they're responsible for the decline of the committee. They still pretend to be carrying something called – not the FPCC, but a substitute for the FPCC – they still carried it, but it's them, and nobody else of any consequence. And the FPCC prevailed before the Stalinists' actions – it had a very broad base of support – in the NDP and everywhere else.

## *PHOTOS*

- c.1960-1 Defending Cuba -- demonstration at US Consulate, Toronto (Joe Rosenblatt holding YSA picket, Cliff Orchard & Pat Brain on right)
- c.1960-2 Pat Brain on Cuba solidarity picket at Old City Hall "US get out of Guantanamo"
- c.1960-5 LSA veteran Vern & wife Anne Olson, Fair Play for Cuba leaders
- 1961 Ruth Bullock, Malcolm Bruce and Ross Dowson announce the formation of the LSA calling for an organized left caucus in the New Party (NDP)
- 1962-1 Chair Vern Olson, US guest Dave Dellinger--Fair Play for Cuba banquet
- 1964-1 Canadian students off to Cuba to get facts – a true Peace Corps
- 1965-2 Vernel and Helen Olson at U.S. Consulate leading Fair Play protest against Cuba blockade

## **Part 11 La Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière “colonized” in 1964, publishing *La Lutte Ouvrière* and later a popular tabloid, *Libération* (1971-1974 and later)\***

And then we exerted ourselves when we met and recruited – we placed resources at their disposal so they could sink deep roots (*among*) the Québécois – so we could publish a paper – we published a French paper and an English paper, (*which became*) quite effective; we sent comrades down there, as a matter of fact John Darling went down there (*to help produce our paper La Lutte Ouvrière –Ed.*), and quite a few others (*actually, young Torontois Richard Fidler, the first editor of the iconic LLO, and Michel (Mike) Mill were the pioneer leading figures – followed later later by Pat Mitchell and LSO organizer/activist Art Young along with partner Penny Simpson in the early 70s –Ed.*)

We started to recruit very early people who were in Quebec, who lived in Quebec, francophones, (*and*) anglophones, a lot of (*whom*) of course knew French – we recruited anglophones who became leaders in the Québécois radicalization – I'm trying to think of his name – Alain Beiner, a Québécois, a very influential person in the Quebec national struggle, and of course (*Ontarian, Stan*) Gray, the leader of McGill-français (*though never a comrade or involved in our movement – Ed.*) – you know, the major university in Montreal was an English university, so persons like Grey, who was very sympathetic to us and with whom we still have relations – he became the leader of a movement which tried to establish McGill as a francophone university. (*See documentation and journals at W7, W8 and W9 in the Dowson archives – ed.*)

But I have not thought about how exactly we went about this – we did it sort of automatically – we knew that Quebec was key and important to building a Canadian movement, you know. But we eventually identified ourselves, on the basis of discussions, with the right of separation – we supported a separate Quebec – we played a role in the defence of the persons who were arrested around the Laporte affair (*the unintentional death of a kidnapped Liberal cabinet member in the 'terrorist' FLQ letterbox bombings – Ed.*)

### **LSO leaders were arrested and the LSO Mayoralty candidate forced underground during Pierre Trudeau's *War Measures Act* occupation of Montreal by the Canadian Army**

*WR: (What was our response to) the War Measures Act?*

Yes, we opposed the WMA of course, which the best elements did, of course, across Canada. David Lewis took a very good stand against the War Measures Act, and even the former head of the Tory party regretted that he hadn't. But we identified with that struggle very clearly – I'll have to think on it, go through the papers. (It was) not an up-front issue in the radicalization – the Québécois are establishing their rights (... *over a period.*)

That was a key experience – in my opinion, that ended a whole phase of the struggle, when there was a referendum. That does not happen very often in advanced capitalist countries, where the rulers of that country, in compliance with the desires of the oppressed nation, hold a “national referendum” (*i.e., a referendum of the “Québécois nation” – ed.*) When that referendum missed a majority, although it came very close. if you didn't count the anglophones who were quite an important number – quite a percentage of the Quebec population, that referendum won. But the francophone aspirations were immersed by the artificial majority of the anglophones. That ended that period. I think it did. I tried to tell some persons. The whole situation's changed now with the defeat of that referendum. (*end of tape, end of these interviews*)

## REFERENCES:

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- 1974: Normand Guèvremont; *Ouvrons nos contrats, résistons aux injonctions* (La grève du transport de Montréal), Presses socialistes internationalistes (Montréal)
- 1978: Henry Milner: *Politics in the New Quebec*, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto
- 1991: Richard Fidler; *Canada, Adieu? Quebec debates its future*, Oolichan Books, (B.C.)

## NOTES:

\*A selection of articles published in *La Lutte Ouvrière*, *Libération* and *Lutte Ouvrière* 1964-1977 is available in the Dowson archives at W8: "Journaux et cahiers de la LSO/LJS." "Movement documents" are found in French and English at W7, W9 and W10 (1945-1973)

Extensive coverage on Quebec is also available in English throughout from *Workers Vanguard* 1955-1970 and *Labor Challenge* 1970-1977. (See subject indexes W13)

## PHOTOS

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|--------|--|
| 1965-3 | Pat Mitchell and Peter Schulz at first Montreal LSO-HQ, 66 Guilbault                 |
| 1966-1 | LSO organizer Pat Mitchell demands probe into police raid on LSO HQ                  |
| 1967-3 | Art Young and Peter Schulz (r) at 66 rue Guilbault, basement Montreal HQ of the LSO. |
| 1970-1 | "Votons Manon Léger dans Dorion pour un gouvernement des travailleurs"               |
| 1970-2 | Art Young (LSO) speaking with Montreal union leader Michel Chartrand                 |
| 1971-1 | Mass rally for a French Quebec hears LSO speaker Alain Biener                        |
| 1971-3 | Alain Biener addressing rally for Quebec independence July 1, 1971                   |